Lilith

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100th ISSUE

ependent, Jewish & frankly feminist

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00+ Hot Jewish Feminist Ideas

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germinal not seminal green simchas
eradicating breast cancer
Orthodox feminist—no oxymoron
Venta: the consummate networker
mainstreaming queer jews
ve's apple zaftig is beautiful...p.10

VOLUME 33, NO. 3
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20s & 30s on Jobs in Jewish Nonprofits
What They Love, Why They Leave

Celebrating with **A Seasonal Ritual for Starting Over**

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Three Women Navigate Through

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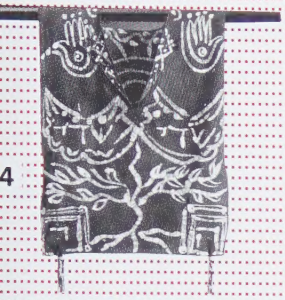
Plan A℠

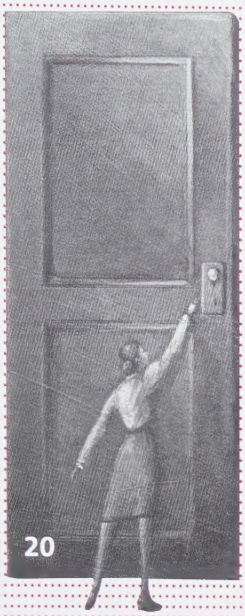
NCJW's Campaign for Contraceptive Access

Lilith

Fall 2008
Volume 33, No. 3

independent, Jewish & frankly feminist





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Cover: Aliza Dzik.

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Why is this magazine called Lilith?

In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said, "We are equal because we are created from the same earth."

from The Alphabet of Ben Sira, 23a-b

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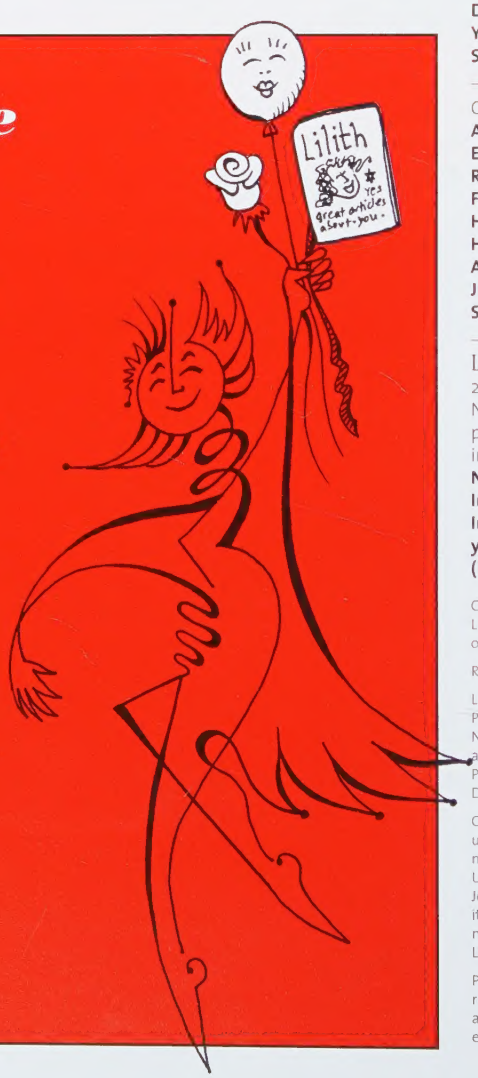

Lilith
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Lilith

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In honor of Lilith's 100th issue, Editor-in-Chief Susan Weidman Schneider is grilled by Senior Editor Susan Schnur.

SCHNUR: Egad, Schneider, did you ever think you'd see 100 issues of Lilith?

SCHNEIDER: A life sentence. It's hard to believe. I'm so focused on the day-to-day running of the magazine that I rarely stop to take the measure of the whole enterprise. What's turned out to be one of my biggest sources of delight: seeing, in each issue, the grand kaleidoscopic mix, *shaping* this mix, listening to all the different voices. I didn't know that this part would feel so…enduring.

Q: What did you think at the beginning, 100 issues ago?

A: We were a "women's collective," the real item. We didn't want to homogenize ourselves, to find "one true voice." We wanted to hear *all* the voices. In the early years, I was the only one with children. The phone would ring, I'd shush the kids, there was a blurring of boundaries. Lilith has remained an honest feminist workplace in this way. Interns come and go and come back again; Naomi takes off two hours in the middle of each day; Mel shuffles her whole schedule when she takes classes; you've taken off six months here or there. We have a fluidity that serves the magazine well.

Q: Were there any big shifts along the way, crossroads where Lilith decided to take one fork instead of another?

A: In the 1980s there was a gradual shift of tone, away from the "we know best" of the earlier issues. And later, when we reported on Jewish family violence or on Shlomo Carlebach's sexual misconduct, there was something of a shift in content, too, with the steely job of calling things as we saw them.

Here's what has stayed constant. We made a precocious commitment to women's personal narratives. We got how radical this was—that, woman by woman, these stories were absolutely pushing Judaism forward in powerful directions.

Q: Was there ever a point where you felt, "Oh, okay, Jewish women's work is done. Time to pack it in?"

A: People do ask us that. And my feeling is that we could, God forbid, put out an issue of Lilith *daily*. (The Lilith Blog does this, in a way.) There's so much that's happening for Jewish women. Lilith legitimately needs to revisit some issues for each new generation. To introduce anew Bella Abzug, say, but with a new slant, or the long arc of abortion and fertility arguments, or the Jewish and female relationship with the Earth. Jewish women are so brainy and thoughtful and fearless and creative. Our work will never be *done*.

Q: What if Lilith had become a general feminist magazine—not Jewish? That would have charted a radically different course.

A: But to be honest, we would have had to give up our more historic task: to take these opposing poles of Judaism and feminism and pull them closer and closer into alignment. That's what these 100 issues of Lilith are about. Jewish women no longer have poles to reconcile; we have a rich exploration of increasingly overlapping territory, and also territory that still has to be brought in.

Q: Sometimes, Schneider, if we're working at the office really late and we're utterly exhausted, you'll answer the phone, "Lilith World Headquarters." There's some truth to this, like you've been a sentry, standing watch over the bow….

A: Yesterday we got a call—"I'm putting together a feminist curriculum for 8th grade girls, can you help me?" The day before, "Do you know anything about female *moyels*?" "I've just been asked to run a funeral…." Even with the Internet, Lilith's office does feel like Jewish Feminist Central. There are now 80 Lilith salons worldwide; the internship program, the traveling exhibition.

Q: Three more questions and then let's eat lunch, it's 6 o'clock. Okay. What would the Jewish-and-female world have lost without 100 issues of Lilith?

A: Connective tissue. And a consistent lens on a critical set of issues. And a vast fabric woven of different threads.

When we created our fabulous Lilith exhibition panels a few years ago, it forced us to comb through every one of the magazines we'd published—we saw the evergreens and the one-of-a-kind pieces—and the experience put us plunk in the middle of our strength: our collectivity. I'm only one set of eyes and ears; I turn to everyone in the office. Lilith is primordially about feedback, about receptivity. What does everyone who troops through the office have to say? What are the thousands of manuscripts we get every year saying? A few 16-year-olds recently spent an afternoon at the office. Everything stopped. We wanted to simply listen to them, to learn from them, to run things past them.

Q: Suze, you started this magazine as a twenty-something young mother. Do you worry about staying the course with readers of all ages?

A: Well, experience has made me grow more confident in my personal editorial judgment. The magazine's grown more confident, too. And Jewish women have grown more confident about how to effect change.

But I am not Lilith magazine—it makes me really uneasy when people posit that. Granted, aside from writing books, giving lectures, I've devoted most of my adult work life to Lilith; I'm the one who worries about how to raise the money, make the deadlines. I take credit for orchestrating the parts, and I do care fiercely about the quality of the writing, of the product. But what I love most is that Lilith works because of each one of us: each reader, each writer, each contributor at a salon, each sugar-mommy. It's the sum of its parts.

Q: A final *kishkes* question, since I'm so hungry. Do you have 100 more issues in you?

A: Yes. *Alevei.* Even 120. Though we may have to go monthly.

Traditionally, the voice of a Jewish woman was not to be heard in public, lest it arouse men. These pages are for news about Jewish women in our own strong voices.

Closing the Gap Between Jewish Learning and Art

"What's important is for the artists to feel that this is really feeding them." **Eve Grubin** isn't talking about food—she's talking about the Jewish learning that goes on at an unusual new program for artists. The Drisha Arts Fellowship, which aims to "revitalize the Jewish community by producing Jewishly knowledgeable artists," is growing exponentially as artists of all stripes apply.

Drisha known as an educational institution that empowers Jewish women through rigorous text study; for nearly 30 years it has been turning out female graduates who've altered the face of Jewish scholarship and teaching. The Arts Fellowship started two years ago with just two students (of whom Grubin, who now does publicity for the program, was one); now there are 16 enrollees—writers, singers, composers, painters, potters, actors, dancers, jewelry makers, musicians, poets, choreographers and visual artists, all accomplished in their fields, including fiction author **Sarah Heller**, dancer **Anna Schön**, musician **Basya Schecter** of Pharaoh's Daughter, and filmmaker **Laura Wiessen** among them. Fellows, who can enroll part-time or full-time, join in regular Drisha classes. Depending on interest in and familiarity with Jewish sources, they may study Biblical Hebrew or intensive Talmud. They also meet regularly as a group, both to study a specially selected text, and for "salons" where they discuss their work and their studies. An end-of-year event showcases their artistic endeavors.

The Fellowship is clearly enhancing the artists' professional lives. But the effect goes further. **Lia Lynn Rosen**, a Fellow alum who has since taken over as educational director for a small New Mexico synagogue, told Lilith that "the integration of the arts into

Judaism may not be *the* way to reinvigorate Judaism, but it's certainly my way. I think Drisha picked up on that. I think in that way we helped each other."

Nourishing the artists—and we don't mean food.

"The thing that's unique about this program is *not* just that it brings together Judaism and the arts, which I think is a trend right now," Grubin explains. "It's the rigorous learning aspect. There's a real gap between the arts world and the world of Jewish learning. I think it behooves us to close that gap, and that's what we're doing here."

MELANIE WEISS

Was Shakespeare's Dark Lady Actually Jewish? Was She Actually Shakespeare?

Would the words of **William Shakespeare** sound different if authored by a playwright with another name? Specifically, what if a dark-complexioned woman of Italian-Moroccan Jewish heritage composed his plays? What if such familiar works as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It* were in fact dreamed up by **Amelia Bassano Lanye**—a little known Elizabethan poet born into a Marrano family of court musicians with strong connections to the same theatrical community to which the Bard of Avon belonged?

Ask **John Hudson**, a British-born polymath scholar and founder of the Dark Lady Players, a New York-based theatrical group that champions Bassano Lanyer's authorship of the Shakespeare canon, and prepare to entertain a radical re-reading of the complete works of the poet most of us call Shakespeare.

In the 1970s, the noted Shakespeare scholar and biographer **A. L. Rowse** asserted that Bassano Lanyer was the "Dark Lady" to whom Shakespeare addressed his famous sonnet cycle, though other Shakespeare scholars have generally disregarded that claim.

But Hudson is the first to propose Bassano Lanyer as the author of Shakespeare's canon. He cites biographical facts upon which most scholars agree: Bassano Lanyer (January 1569 – April 1645) was a poet in her own right, one of the first women writing in English to publish a substantial volume of her own work, *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum* ("Hail, God, King of the Jews"), which appeared in 1611. Evidence suggests that her father, **Baptist Bassano**, was a court musician from Venice whose family had originated in Morocco and had at some point converted from Judaism. Her mother, **Margaret Jonson**, a British-born Christian, belonged to a family of musicians who performed regularly at court and for the London theater. Especially for a middle-class woman of the era, Bassano Lanyer was highly educated—courtesy of having spent her early years at the home of **Susan Bertie**, Countess of Kent. She also gained first-hand access to court life when, at age 18, she became the mistress of **Lord Hundson**, a man 45 years her senior—and who, as Queen Elizabeth's Lord Chamberlain, supervised London's theaters. Her life changed yet again, when she became pregnant, in 1592, and was hastily married off to yet another court musician, **Alphonso Lanyer**.

Getting from this brief life outline to authorship of Shakespeare's works sounds like a giant leap, indeed. Hudson predicates his theory on close textual analysis that reveals uncanny parallels between the content and wording of the plays and the knowledge and background of Bassano Lanyer. Hudson ticks them off, one by one: the wealth of musical references throughout the plays (300% more, he says, than found in any other contemporary playwright); the detailed knowledge of Italy and use of Italian sources for many of the plays; the use of Hebrew phrases in at least two plays; the frequency with which characters named Emilia, Bassano and variants thereof appear; and all that cross-dressing and those strong female characters....All—and much more, including

One daring critic asserts that the plays contain hidden allegories to Jewish history, and that clues point the way to a new author for the canon known as "Shakespeare."

similarities between Bassano Lanyer's published poems and those of Shakespeare—specifically point to Bassano Lanyer as the true author of Shakespeare's works, Hudson believes.

But why would she keep her authorship a secret? According to Hudson, she did so to hide the blasphemous allegorical meanings she embedded within the plays—and to shield herself and her family from severe punishment meted out to religious dissidents. How blasphemous are those allegories? In his view, Bassano Lanyer intended *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a multi-tiered allegory about the destruction of Jerusalem and a cutting religious satire of the Gospels. *As You Like It*, he believes, can be de-coded as a revenge drama directed against the Roman emperors who waged war against the Jews. A deeper allegorical reading of *The Merchant of Venice* turns its anti-Semitic message inside out, he suggests. Hudson's theater company, the Dark Lady Players, has so far produced versions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It* that underscore these points.

As intriguing as Hudson's hypothesis is, he has a long road ahead convincing others. According to **Kari Boyd McBride**, a professor of women's studies and English literature at the University of Arizona, Hudson's theory, like other alternative authorship theories, "doesn't merit consideration...there's no reason to think that [Lanyer] even knew Shakespeare."

Nonetheless, the poems Amelia Bassano Lanyer signed with her own name deserve reading in their own right.

DIANE COLE

Letter from California

The last time I wrote for Lilith, I had recently celebrated my commitment ceremony, a day of unparalleled joy for me and my wife. (See cover below.) However, as we sanctified our union before our community, a part of us still mourned the fact that we were considered unfit for legal marriage. Three years later Arielle and I are living in California. We rejoiced when the State Supreme Court proclaimed that gays and lesbians should be granted the right to marry. On June 25th, we stood in a garden before a handful of friends and an officiant who married us under California law. My eyes filled with tears when I said "I do." We were finally equal under the law.

In recent months, the restrictive marriage policies within Israel have come under fire. The Israeli branch of Conservative Judaism, the Masorti movement, has taken an active role in changing the law which mandates an Orthodox wedding in order to become legally wed. It doesn't matter if the couple isn't Orthodox, or if they practice Buddhism. There is only one way, one form of religious practice that is seen as worthy of legal recognition. It is this stranglehold over marriage that has for years pushed the non-Orthodox to travel abroad to get a civil marriage. The Masorti movement has been working to help people who aren't comfortable with Orthodox parameters find a way to a ceremony they truly celebrate. Their new campaign, called "Play The Wedding Game," is an online platform where couples are invited to customize a wedding ceremony congruent with their own wishes and religious beliefs.

This is an important step in creating a pluralistic approach towards marriage, as is the California decision. We should celebrate this move towards equality. The legal covenant that underlies marriage shouldn't be confused with a moral authority that underlies religion. This is not to say that religion and marriage don't mix. My partner and I wanted to have a religious wedding ceremony, but we also wanted to have the legal imprimatur.

Whether gay or non-Orthodox, or both, people who cannot claim mainstream identity should not be barred from the legal and social benefits that marriage confers. Perhaps it's time to look at marriage through the lens of diversity. Just as we respect biodiversity in the natural world, we should honor it too in a social framework.

TAMAR PRAGER

Lilith
INDEPENDENT, JEWISH & FRANKLY FEMINIST
Out of the closet & under the chuppah
Attention Jewish women: Who cleans your house?
Disappointed in zippers (in Lower Manhattan)

"It would be easy to think that religious single women have nothing in common with the untrammeled sexuality of Carrie and her friends. *Au contraire.* While the necklines are higher and the skirts are a little longer, single religious women are also looking for Mr. Big."

Modesty Blasé, June 30th, 2008, on the Lilith blog

"Once the glass ceiling breaks, it's hard to put it back."

Hadassah president **Nancy Falchuk**, quoted in the blog *Jewess.canonist.com*

"We sometimes call it a cement ceiling. Unlike glass, it can be seen clearly, and never breaks."

Shuli Binah, at a Lilith salon in Chicago

For Orthodox, a New Spin on Sex-Ed

The news of two new developments in Modern Orthodox sex education raised my interest, but also my skepticism. Since halakha—Jewish law—is quite restrictive on sexual behavior before marriage, I wondered what these educators would say besides "Don't try this at home"? Apparently, a lot.

Until very recently, discussions of sexuality were virtually absent from even liberal Modern Orthodox day schools, but now Tzelem, a project of Yeshiva University's Center for the Jewish Future, is piloting the "Life Values and Intimacy Education" curriculum in two schools. Recognizing that no existing sex-ed curricula would be appropriate in this context, **Yocheved Debow** and **Anna Wruble** adapted them into units that go beyond mechanics, says **Jennie Rosenfeld**, Tzelem's director. The new classes will cover human anatomy, sexual orientation, body image, STDs, sexual abuse, sexual ethics, *tzniut* (modesty) and the Jewish laws concerning physical contact and sexuality. Rosenfeld—whose Ph.D. dissertation was entitled "Talmudic Re-readings: Toward a Modern Orthodox Sexual Ethic"—says this program sends the message that sexuality is not something to be "cordoned off." She explains that Judaism views sex as "*kedusha*" (holiness); the body is holy and therefore deserving of respect, and students are advised to use this perspective to guide their actions.

Beyond "mechanics," new ways of teaching are both more explicit and more understanding.

Rosenfeld hopes that the curriculum achieves a balance, not enforcing Jewish law to the point where students feel guilty, but at the same time "not flouting halakha." Rosenfeld says teachers take the approach of "minimizing feelings of transgression" so that students don't feel like they have done something "off the charts" if, for example, they held hands. Rather than fostering feelings of guilt and inadequacy, this program offers understanding.

There's change afoot also in another resource where Orthodox women can get information about sex. Kallah (bride) teachers, over a series of 5-8 classes, instruct brides-to-be about the laws of *niddah* (pertaining to sexual relations within a marriage). These classes are often the "last stand" according to Rosenfeld, the last opportunity to prepare women for a sexual relationship. **Bat Sheva Marcus**, chair of a recent conference co-sponsored by the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance (JOFA) to train such teachers, told Lilith that women had "nobody to talk to about sex," and that kallah teachers often avoided sexual issues or passed along their own misconceptions to their students—"the blind leading the blind," notes Rosenfeld, who described brides being told that sex is not pleasurable for women, but that they should "grin and bear it" for their husband's sake. Marcus, Clinical Director of the Medical Center for Female Sexuality, noted cases where women were informed that they should not fantasize, that oral sex is always forbidden and that they can have sex only at night and in the dark. Both Marcus and Rosenfeld point out that while there are indeed Jewish texts with negative and restrictive statements about sex, there are also positive and flexible attitudes within the Jewish tradition; one of their goals is to communicate this to brides.

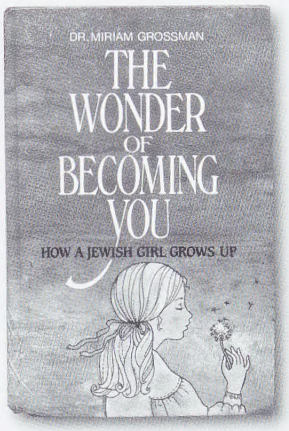
By educating a group of 15 kallah teachers about the wide range of human sexual activity—oral, anal, manual, bondage, etc.—they're encouraged to discuss these with their students. And rather than saying that X is not permitted and that's the end of the story, these teachers now have access to the broadest range of Jewish legal sources and options.

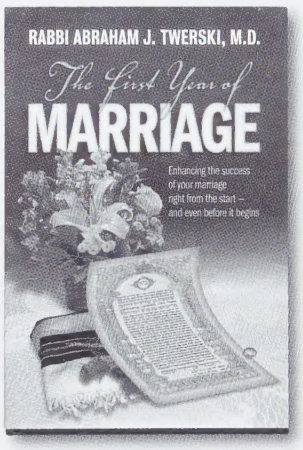
Both Rosenfeld and Marcus report cases of brides who simply do not know how to have intercourse. Marcus emphasizes that women should be told that sex can be awkward at first and that the penis "does not have radar." The goal is both to provide knowledge and to open the lines of communication; women won't know what information they are missing unless their teachers themselves are more forthcoming. If enlightened sexual education in Orthodox schools becomes more common, kallah teachers will no longer bear the brunt of educating woman about their bodies and the sexual experience. Marcus believes that "we need to do a better job educating our kids," and would like to see programs for parents, too. With this in mind, Tzelem is a developing a sexuality manual that will speak to the Orthodox population and their unique set of issues. Rosenfeld predicts such tools will lead to "healthier people in the community, stronger marriages and more well-adjusted individuals."

For now, these new initiatives mark a significant departure from past Orthodox silence on sex. In a world where there are ads for KY Jelly on trains, it's about time.

SHIRA BISTRICER

For more:
www.yu.edu/cjf/tzelem/




RABBI ABRAHAM J. TWERSKI, M.D.
The First Year of
MARRIAGE
Enhancing the success of your marriage right from the start – and even before it begins

The new sex-ed goes way beyond these less-than-helpful manuals

Diversity in Paint and in Life

If any artist can embody the essence of a globalized world, it is surely **Siona Benjamin**, originally from the Bene Israel community of Mumbai (Bombay), whose work was included in a show July 2008 at Manhattan's A.I.R. gallery.

Having grown up in a Hindu and Muslim society, and educated at Catholic and Zoroastrian schools, Benjamin is committed to her Jewish heritage. Living in America since graduate school, Benjamin has built her career around an artistic style that celebrates this diversity. Her paintings, rich in color and depth, are influenced by everything from Byzantine icons and medieval manuscripts to Indian miniatures and Sephardic imagery, brought vividly to life by gouache paint and gold leaf. Many languages, Jewish and Indian symbols, and the occasional jarring—but effective—reference to contemporary American culture make this a canon of work that embraces a harmonic multiculturalism. The series "Finding Home" features many lovely reinterpretations of female biblical characters, including several renditions of Lilith (see above for one example).

Says the artist, "I would like my audience to re-evaluate their notions and concepts about identity and race, thus understanding that such misconceptions could lead to racism, hate and war." A new show, "Lilith in the New World," opens soon in NYC.

M.W.

Fearless Friend of Film

When Carole Zabar created last year's Other Israel film festival, she says her brother-in-law worried that customers of Zabar's, the renowned family food business on Manhattan's Upper West Side, might complain about the festival's focus on Israeli Arabs. Hardly. The festival, under the auspices of the JCC of Manhattan, was so successful that a second run opens this fall. Zabar, a longtime supporter of Israeli culture, particularly documentary film, spent her college years, in the early 1960s, at Hebrew University. She speaks fluent Hebrew, and says this unique festival grew out of her observation that though Israel's Arab citizens (Christian, Muslim, Bedouin and Druze) are about one-fifth of the country's population, American Jews "have no awareness of what's going on in these communities."

When veteran Palestinian Israeli filmmaker Mohammad Bakri, one of Zabar's Facebook friends and really a close personal friend, challenged her about a film he thought portrayed an Arab "Uncle Tom"—and which she screened anyway—"I told him, 'You want Arabs to look good. I want to show things as they are. If there are Uncle Toms, show it.' We Jews are used to airing our dirty linen in public. Arabs can't believe this! Arabs don't want to make films about their lives—because invariably with any documentary you have to show the warts.

"Film is a great medium," Zabar (above) declared in a recent breakfast conversation (not at Zabar's). "In the arts you have the best chance of getting together. This part of the population will never be Jewish, and it has something to give. Arab culture, language, art, film, painting. Now Israel embraces the Sephardi. Now every family in Israel has hummus in the fridge. But it wasn't like this in the 60s.

"Growing up an Arab in Israel is no fun," she noted. And the lives of women in these villages can be especially difficult. "A very tender subject." Zabar calls it. "There's no public transportation, schools are not as good, and aren't plugged into the wider Israeli society." The villages have become "more traditional, more rigid. The more traditional in villages seem to live in a different country." Films in this year's Other Israel lineup probe this "tender subject." Among them, "Desert Brides" and "Lady Kul El Arab." (See page 46 for details.)

Zabar, trained as a lawyer, talks frankly (as she does about nearly everything) about a her law school course in feminist legal theory: "That's where I learned the power of women's stories."

SUSAN WEIDMAN SCHNEIDER

New—and Startling—Images from Israel

BETWEEN MOTHER AND CHILD, THE QUESTIONS OF GENDER

"Ima, Lo Haragti Et Ha-Bat Shelach" ("Mom, I Didn't Kill Your Daughter") is a documentary on a topic not often approached: transgender identity in an Israeli context. The film poignantly maneuvers its way through the challenges in a gender-role-laden society for **Lior**, the person born female who will soon transition to male, and his already gender-transitioned partner, **Yuval**. The JCC Manhattan's annual Faigeleh Film Festival recently screened this offering from Israeli director **Orna Ben Dor**.

The story centers primarily on Lior's transition from female to male, and opens with a string of self-made video journals marking various stages of Lior's evolution. Lior's complex gender identity unveils itself as a pony-tailed, high-pitched Lior blares back from the screen, lamenting his feminine appearance. In explaining to us his discomfort in a feminine body and the sense of agreement he feels identifying as male, the audience begins to connect to Lior's experience. As we witness Lior's presentation as male it feels inconceivable to place him into the accepted standards of femininity. When he emerges from his mastectomy procedure exhilarated, the viewer appreciates his excitement as reconciliation between his outer appearance and his inner feelings take shape.

As Lior's transition happens step by step, Rivkah struggles with the loss of her daughter and the emergence of an unknown son.

Simultaneously Lior's partner, Yuval, who transitioned seven years ago, begins the next phase of his identity by changing his legal documents to stipulate "male," a process heretofore unknown in Israel. His story of difference reinforces Lior's experience and conversely confounds Lior's childhood dreams of heterosexual normalcy. In exploring their relationship, the film reveals the dividing line between gender and sexuality.

As the challenges the two men face unfold, Lior's mother, **Rivkah**, stands in their midst, struggling to accept the loss of her daughter and the emergence of an unknown son. She laments Lior's changes and doesn't recognize his new voice; our sympathies are with her as she listens, stunned, to the details of a mastectomy. Though Rivkah maintains her love, and goes with Lior to the surgery, the audience too feels caught between the divergent wishes of mother and child.

Through the evolving relationships of Lior, Yuval and Rivkah, Ben Dor reminds her viewers gender should never be taken for granted. The film portrays gender-variant identity, exploring the profound role gender plays in the lives of transgender and genderqueer individuals.

SIMCHA HANSON

ON CAMERA, ISRAELI WOMEN SOLDIERS SPEAK

"So you're the [one] who squealed on us," a male superior officer in the Israeli army accuses Dana, after she tried to report that his unit of the army had looted from an Arab village. In a documentary film now making the rounds of film festivals, Dana, an education officer, recounts how that incident taught her to keep quiet; that as a woman she was just supposed to be sweet and make sure her hair smelled good. Dana and the five other female soldiers interviewed in **Tamar Yarom's** new and chilling documentary, "To See If I'm Smiling," decided *not* to remain silent; here they share stories of their past in the army.

Men's war stories seem to trump those of women, the filmmaker explained in a recent Q&A following a screening of "Smiling" (her second film). After her own service in 1988 and even today, she said she sees no outlet for female soldiers to talk about their own experiences. Few women—and only one of these interviewees—served as combat soldiers; women have been used in combat only since 2000. However, their non- combat roles were also crucial, demanding or distressing. These six women, stationed in either the West Bank or Gaza Strip, relate their moral dilemmas and disclose the guilt, regret, shame and anger they still hold years later.

Israel is the only country with compulsory military service for women and at 18, post-high school, women serve for two years in a wide variety of jobs. They enter as teenagers but grow up instantly, whether they must clean a corpse, inspect Arab women who are wearing only bras and panties or club protestors in the street. The women soldiers in this film report dealing with "struggling to remain humane," "the unbearable lightness of death," and "a black past that I want to erase."

Originally titled, "No Place for a Lady," Yarom aptly notes that the movie is more about an extreme situation than about gender. The occupation is portrayed as the real tragedy in this film. These interviews, accompanied by archival footage, reveal precisely this: that the grave effects of the war reach everyone.

One story, tied to the film's title, awakens haunting resonance to Abu Ghraib. Meytal, a medic, hesitantly describes taking a photo of herself beside a Palestinian corpse, then becomes ashamed, and tries to forget the incident. She says that she still wonders about the picture and wants to see if she looks different, if she is smiling in it. When in the end she does look at the photo, which remains concealed from the audience, she delivers the final line of the film: "How in the hell did I ever think I'd be able to forget about it."

ELIZABETH LONDON

Lilith editors suggest: for a very interesting take on Israeli film, read Amy Kronish on her new blog at www.israelfilm.blogspot.com. She founded the Jewish Film Festival at the Jerusalem Cinematheque.

Aliyot for women ~ advocating for the rights of Agunot ~ safe, legal & accessible Abortion ~ eve's Apple—knowledg is good ~ Archiving our foremothers' stories ~ eradicating Breast cancer ~ Blessing & prayers ac dressing God as female ~ Busting abusive rabbis ~ Bat mitzvah for girls & grownups ~ Birth control pills ~ Bellydancin as childbirth preparation ~ Big-mouth women ~ Balance in work and life ~ Cholent/hameen/crockpot (so you can c anything you like while dinner cooks) ~ Counting women in the minyan ~ Cantors who are gals ~ Compassion for th egyptian mothers who lost their firstborn children ~ Divorce, knowing life goes on after ~ Doctor; be one (you don't have to marry one) ~ Disabilities consciousness ~ treating Domestic workers justl ~ Daughters as heirs ~ Dust is not *hametz*, remember at passover ~ Eating with gusto ~ embracing Egalitarianism

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Premier issue

1977

1981

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the Equal rights amendment ~ taking women's Friendship seriously ~ Frozen challah ~ jewish women's Foundations ~ First-menstruation ceremonies ~ "Green" simchas ~ brides breaking a Glass too ~ saying "Germinal" (not "seminal") ~ helping Girls—and boys—become feminists ~ Genderbending ~ Hamantasch as pudendal art ~ new feminist words in Hebrew ~ acknowledging women's particular Holocaust experi- ences ~ Hairwise, grey being the new black ~ IVF ~ Introducing ourselves through our maternal line ~ women peace activists in Israel and around the world ~ the Internet as a radical tool for women's liberation ~ overcoming the JAP stereotype ~ feminist Judaism a magnet for Jews by choice ~ Kosher shelters for battered women ~ Kaddish recited by women ~ Lactivism ~ Loving your jewish body ~ revisiting history with a gender Lens ~ not changing Last names ~ new Language for God ~ women as Leaders ~ new uses for Mikveh ~ Maternity leave ~ Miriam's cup ~ Matchmaking ~ Mammograms ~ creating new Midrash ~ women as Mohels ~ Men who decline to join all-Male boards or panels ~ Never trusting the simple reading of a sacred

ext ~ saying "No." ~ Naming the things that cause us pain and joy ~ Orange on the seder plate ~ Orthodox feminist
s no Oxymoron ~ facing Paradoxical family legacies ~ Prenuptial agreements, halakhic
and secular ~ the Personal as political ~ Pants ~ taking Paternity leave ~ feminist Philanthropy ~ dresses
vith Pockets ~ Protecting women & girls, men & boys from sexual harassment ~ mainstreaming Queer jews ~ Rosh
odesh ~ Rabbis who are women ~ self-made Rituals for healing ~ *Simchat bat:* newborn girl-naming ceremonies ~
Sisterhoods are powerful ~ Salons ~ teaching about pleasure in jewish
Sex-ed ~ Single mothers by choice ~ Shabbat: girls saying kiddush ~ Sofrot (women scribes) ~ taking risks to
eport the Truth ~ Torah commentaries by women ~ Tampons ~ Tallitot for women ~ seating enough women at the
oard Table ~ The Underrated art of nagging ~ Vagina & Vulva are not Vulgar words ~ Vashti flags at the megillah
eading ~ listening to women's Voices ~ Winning... ~ Watching out for jewish women in the

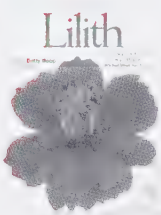
FEMINIST IDEAS

2000

2001

2003

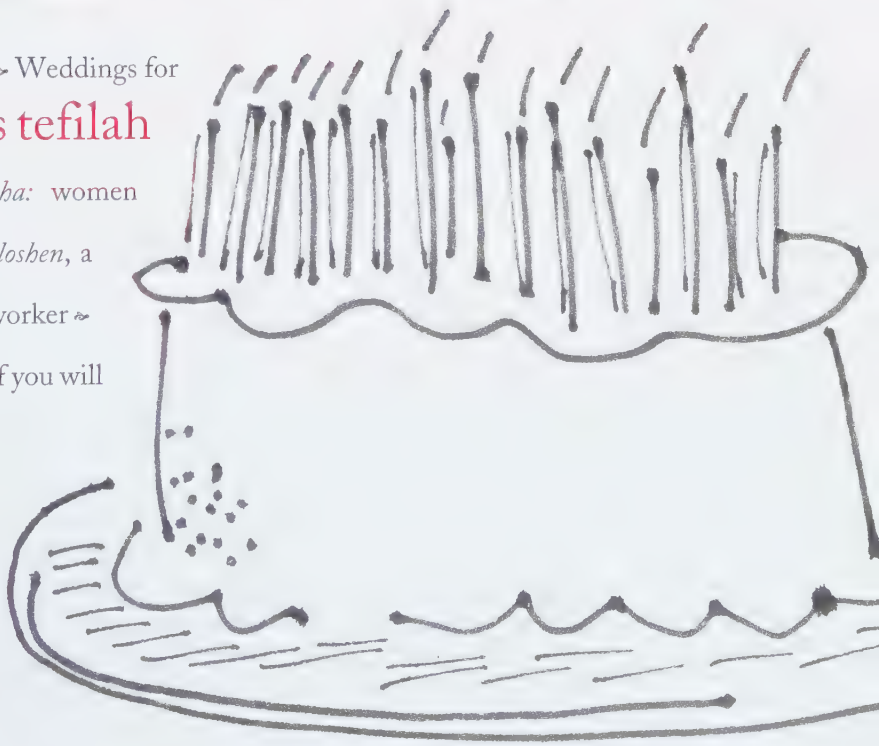
2004



2005

2008

nedia ~ women praying at the Western Wall ~ Weddings for
ny couple who wants them ~ Women's tefilah
groups ~ Xenophilia ~ *Yoatzot halakha:* women
nterpreters of Jewish law ~ Yiddish as *mame loshen*, a
emale language ~ Yenta, the consummate networker ~
Zaftig is beautiful ~ Zionism—which teaches if you will
t you can make it happen.



Our thanks to the many Lilith readers and editorial board members who made suggestions for this admittedly idiosyncratic list. To add your own favorites, email info@Lilith.org. We'll put the expanded list up on our website.

CANCER BITCH

A Journal

by S.L. WISENBERG

February 19. A Filling Without a Sandwich

I am a member of the Sandwich Generation—Baby Boomers (mostly women) who are caught between taking care of cranky teenagers and creaky parents. Except I have no children and my surviving parent walks the mall five days a week, lifts weights in her morning exercise class, goes to more movies and lectures than I do, and still sends me money—for my birthday, Chanukah, Valentine's Day, and whenever she makes a withdrawal from a limited partnership, in some financial transaction I don't quite understand. She doesn't need me to send her checks or to help her understand Medicare Part D. (For this I'm grateful. And I'd probably pass my mother's questions on to my husband, Linc, who explained it to his mother.) Now I am the one going into the hospital for the second time in less than a year, and she's the one flying up to take care of me. On the phone Sunday she asked me if I needed her to do anything. I said, tentatively, If you're going shopping... Are you going shopping...? Because she is a shopper. Not a clotheshorse, but a lifelong shopper and comparer of merchandise. She is comfortable shopping. And as she strides through the mall she goes into the stores and sees what's on the racks. She said, Yeah, and I said, Maybe you could buy me a robe—because my two robes are terry cloth and I think they'd be too heavy to wear in the hospital bed. But she'd already beat me to it. She'd bought me a silky robe and a washable one and another one, and is bringing them with her, and I can choose any or all, she said, and she also bought me a button-down top, and my sister has approved of the purchases. I mean I just realized two days before that most of my tops go on over my head and that I hardly have any that button or zip, and that I probably won't be able to raise my left arm for a while, and she's more prepared than I am.

What I'm trying to say is that my mother still takes care of me and by rights she shouldn't have to, and she's 28 years older than I am and is healthier. Cancer-free. She is thinner and more moderate in her habits. I am faster and stronger and my hearing is better, I could beat her at mall walking, as well I should.

I feel like I'm complaining. I don't want my mother to be sick and feeble. My friend Dan is almost 60 and he says he's never grown up because he never had children. To parent (well) you must sacrifice and think of others—who are helpless—before you think of yourself. I have never taken care of anyone in that way. Linc and I have, I suppose, a mutual care-taking pact, but he's not helpless (except when he's trying to find something in the refrigerator.)

Do I feel guilty bringing my mother out of retirement to take care of me? No, because she's not flying here to be my full-time nursemaid. It's only for a week or so. And she likes it. (What kids always say when they're pulling too hard on the dog's tail: But she likes it, Ma.) Really, she does. She likes feeling needed. Am I feeling guilty for having a mother capable of taking care of me? For being pleased that she wants to? Guilty because I'm not taking care of her. She doesn't need help. I researched hotels for her last night and then she called and said that when she made her plane reservation, the agent offered her a good rate (This price won't last, he told her) on a hotel. She'll pay for her flight and for her taxi and hotel. (She doesn't stay with us. She prefers a hotel.) I feel guilty, most of all, I guess, because having a healthy 78-year-old mother to help me after my mastectomy is a luxury. And luxury, by definition, is an indulgence.

February 20. Heading for Loss

I had a friend, a jokester, who used to open his wallet and ask if you wanted to see his pride and joy. Then he'd pull out a card with a picture of Pride floor wax and Joy dishwashing liquid. For many years my pride and joy has been right there on my head. Friends would say they recognized me from afar by my very thick, wavy hair. In junior high I didn't appreciate my hair. I considered it frizzy and needing to be straightened chemically with Curl-Free, and then physically, by a process called wrapping. The method was passed down by older female friends and relatives, like a folk custom. You needed long bobby pins and a clean, empty orange juice can with both ends removed. After using shampoo and creme rinse (conditioner had not been invented), you would towel-dry your hair, of course, then comb out a section from the top of your head and wind it around the orange juice can, pinning it with the bobby pins. Then you would take the rest of your hair and wrap it around your head (the largest roller of all). Then after wrapping your head tightly you would sit under your hooded hair dryer and talk on the phone for the two hours it took your hair to dry. This is why we washed our hair only once a week.

Somewhere in my 20s, probably when Cher's hairdo changed from curtain-straight to curly, my hair turned from high maintenance to low. Instead of complaining about my hair, I became vain about it. I was proud that curliness and body were things others strove for and that I achieved effortlessly. Women grooming themselves in bathrooms have complimented me on my waves and curls. On the other hand, when a college friend of mine brought me to her parents' for Christmas dinner, her very WASPy mother looked at me carefully and said slowly, Your hair scares me.

My own mother has threatened, when I'm visiting her, to cut my hair in my sleep. My hair is what hers would look like if it were left to its own devices, which it isn't. Ever. Linc is always after me to cut it so he can see my face. So he will.

February 22. A Nervous Laugher

I have become a nervous laugher. I told someone I work with, at the place I will call Smart University, that she should meet with my student teaching intern by herself, that I would normally want a three-way meeting, but I didn't think I could schedule it because—lower my voice, move in closer, laugh a little—I'm having a mastectomy February 28.

THE STITCHES MAKE MY BREAST LOOK SMOOSHED IN, LIKE IT'S BEEN IN AN ACCIDENT. IT HASN'T BEEN; IT'S BEEN IN AN ON-PURPOSE.

I hate nervous laughter. It seems to be covering up, negating what you're saying. I don't want to be a nervous laugher. I remember talking to someone a few years ago about her mastectomy and she was all barky nervous laughter. It put me off. But I am doing it. I'm getting a part of my body cut off, ha-ha. If the cancer has spread I could die, ha-ha. I know that laughter is close to crying, I know that people's faces can take on similar expressions laughing and crying, I know that people say: I didn't know whether to laugh or cry, and: We laughed till we cried. Do people ever cry till they laugh? When you do a book reading before a big crowd, the nervousness and anticipation of the crowd make a little shudder run around the room, and everybody laughs so readily. It's easy to make a happy, willing crowd laugh. They want to laugh. They need it, to let off steam, from their waiting, their wanting. The nervousness of all being together, chairs set up in rows, side by side. Maybe it's the potential danger of the crowd that makes us nervous. Note the side exits. We are animals that need to make noise.

The Auschwitz smile. That's what I call a certain type of survivor smile—a frozen smile that has nothing to do with and all to do with what the survivor is relating. A smile to keep out the horribleness of it all. A smile that keeps some of the past at bay. That keeps the past from rising and twisting and striking again and again, as the voice of the survivor is telling the story once again. First we had this then we didn't and we had no food and we had typhus and they rounded us up... The death and the dirt. The unnecessary loss. There was no reason for the loss. A madness to it all. A madness that made no sense but cut a swath of terror.

February 28. Stiff Upper Lip

I started today to feel there was something wrong with me for not feeling terrible. Do I have a death wish? Did I leap from denial to acceptance in one fell swoop? Do I see the diagnosis as a black-humored punch line delivered by Fate? I admit, I've checked out from the library the only legitimate book of Holocaust humor I know of, *Laughter in Hell*—and what's more, I thought the book was funny. Not joyously funny, but dark cackly funny. It was full of satire and irony by people who were living through a terrible time. Some making fun of the Germans, some of the situation. The essence of the Jewish joke, after all, is that a smart, weak person is in a helpless situation.

So I am a living Jewish joke. My father used to say that the hypochondriac's tombstone says, I told you I was sick. All this worrying about everything, and here I am with a malignancy. Three tumors, or else one big one that's made up of three smaller ones.

Quick, a joke, which may or may not have been in that book: Two German Jews are in Paris in the late 1930s, having fled Berlin. They're sitting at a sidewalk cafe and see a group of French soldiers march by, barely in step. Ach, says one derisively, ours are so much better.

More February 28. The Knife

Will my world finally cave in on me when I wake up tonight and see the bandage covering what used to be my left breast?

March 2. Looking At It

I looked at the incision. To do that I rolled down the camisole and the Ace bandage. There is still some curve to my breast. How much is swelling, I don't know. There are angry stitches on the edge by my underarm and sunken-in stitches about three-fourths of the way across the breast, making the breast look smooshed in, like it's been in an accident. It hasn't been; it's been in an on-purpose. Not as horrible as I thought. I put the bandage back on and then replaced some gauze as protection, between the skin and the white stretchy mastectomy camisole I bought at the hospital gift shop.

I'm going to call it my Soviet camisole; it's unlovely and utilitarian and looks like it was designed by a committee way before Perestroika.

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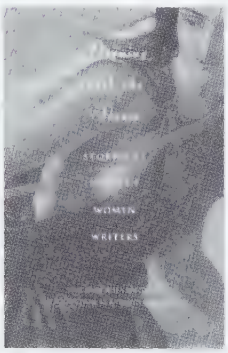

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March 6. Negative and Positive

I got a call that my sentinel node was indeed negative, after the final tests. Which is what everyone predicted. This means that the cancers haven't escaped into my lymph system. When I report this to people, they congratulate me. As if I've done something wonderful.

March 8. What is a Meltdown?

It might be when you're feeling very shatterable and don't want to answer "fine" when people ask you how you are and you're feeling shaky and so instead of going to your mother's hotel to meet her and your husband for an early dinner at 5:30, you go at 5 and lie down in her second bed and start crying and saying that everything is so hard and you hate these drains they won't take out, they hurt you and get in the way, and it's so terrible they have to start giving you poison for 20 weeks, even though the chemo man said most people don't have nausea or vomiting, and she is perfect in her mother role and says yes, it's hard, and lets you sleep till 6:30, when you have to get up and teach your 7 PM class at Smart University three blocks away. And so you teach your class, which isn't as lively and fun as at its best, but still has content and is hysteria-free. At the break your students have a basket at your place at the table with chocolates and soaps and colored pens and books, and you are able to be enthusiastic and grateful. Truly.

At home you sleep and watch TV and call the chemo nurse back to schedule your first round of it and you pause to weep while you're still on the phone, and she says, Are you OK? and you say you are.

Your husband says that someone at work asked how you were and he said you had a meltdown. ■

S.L. Wisenberg is the author of the short story collection The Sweetheart Is In *and the essays* Holocaust Girls: History, Memory & Other Obsessions. Adventures of Cancer Bitch, *based on her blog, http://www.cancer-bitch.blogspot.com, is coming in spring 2009 from University of Iowa Press. This excerpt used with permission.*

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"sublime"
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"wildly original"
—*O*: The Oprah Magazine

"devilishly clever"
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"warmly intelligent"
—L.K. Hanson,
Minnesota Star Tribune

"odd treasure."
—Ariel Levy,
The New York Times Book Review

by Maira Kalman

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Winner of this year's Charlotte Newberger Poetry Prize

A MODICUM OF GRACE (FOR GRACE PALEY)

by LOIS ROISMAN

If we'd sat at her father's seder
and heard his charge to stretch to the stranger,
or inhaled the fragrant conversation
at their Shabbos table—a verbal challah
braided from strands of Yiddish and Russian
and Bronx stooptalk—old distant
voices raging in yet another strangers' world,
shouting witness to the world that ought to be—

And if we'd watched her scale the fence
at the nuclear power plant, or waved
to her through the bars of that Westside jail,
or tromped beside her through the rice
in Viet Nam, or snapped a photo when
she unfurled that No Nuke banner
on the White House lawn, we'd have learned
what's required to be an honorable
member of our species, and live with
a modicum of Grace.

Lois Roisman (1938-2008) was the founding Director of the Jewish Fund for Justice. Her work has appeared in Making a Scene: The Contemporary Drama of Jewish Women, *The Litchfield Review, Poetica and Light. Two volumes of her poetry are forthcoming from Glad Day Books.*

ABOUT THE JUDGE

Dina Elenbogen is the author of the poetry collection Apples of the Earth *(Spuyten Duyvil, 2006). Her poetry and prose have appeared in Tikkun, Midstream and Chicago Reader. She lives in Evanston, IL and teaches at the University of Chicago's Writer's Studio.*

ABOUT THE PRIZE

The poetry prize is named for Charlotte Newberger, whose support for Lilith makes possible the publication of new poems in every issue, reviews of books by established and emerging poets, and this fourth annual poetry competition. Newberger has had a longstanding interest in poetry and the arts, and has served for many years on the boards of such institutions as Chicago's Steppenwolf Theater and The Poetry Center, as well as serving as president of the Foundation for the Jewish Culture.

ThanksGIVING

a short story by MICHELE MERENS

Mostly, esther felt confused. How many, how many? Were twenty forks enough or should she polish more? With exhaustion and only the greatest discipline she surveyed the buffet to insure the olive tray was filled with both greens and blacks, the brisket sliced thin—"Lady, what are you trying to do to me? On Thanksgiving week, no less," the man at the catering place had grumbled when she'd phoned in her request.

Who could worry about a table's presentation, when no mirror could help with her own appearance today? No mirrors, and—her glance taunted even as it fled to the frames draped with towels in the shiva tradition—*no Stephen*, to convince her as he always had before, "Sweetie, you look fine."

In some strange way, she was proud that her hand shook only slightly registering the news. Proud, that she wasn't as blindsided by unknowns tonight as she'd been in the 72 hours since her husband's heart attack. But then hadn't she been a wreck, trying to fashion Stephen's eulogy with a too-young rabbi hired by the funeral home; a shivering mess at the graveside funeral, the damp seeping through her boots; and finally, everything in her grinding into silence amidst the clinking of silverware in the restaurant afterwards. Or how about the breath she'd lost forever, hugging her youngest grandchild, her Suzy, in the airport before Lonnie found them? "Our plane's at the gate, we have to go, Mom. You'll be okay? I love you." When would she hear anyone say, "I love you" again?

Now, surveying the dining room, she couldn't guess how many would come, how long they might stay on this one shiva evening available before the sabbath. Of course it was the worst night to ask anyone to sit, Thanksgiving. People made elaborate plans to be with their families, to feel joyous and content with a full plate on this holiday; Esther worried about the timing, along with everything else.

When she'd finally slept last night, she'd had terrible dreams. She'd dreamt of going down into the grave with Stephen. "Don't leave me," she wept. "Let me lie with you here. *Please*." "There's no room," he replied, his eyes crinkling with that familiar longing. "My bed is a single now, Esther, and so is yours."

Yet this morning, tired as she was, she'd turned to the obituaries in the paper first thing, checking that they'd remembered to list Stephen's name and their address and visitation times. A lecture on "The Intelligence of Listening" caught her eye, but articles on foreclosures and molestations, school test scores dropping, no, she couldn't stomach the rest.

In that moment, Esther had a strange memory of her mother also reading the newspaper backwards from the obits, every morning. "And who today," her mother would ask, "needs our prayers?" Oh, the Orthodox, they stopped morning, noon and night on these questions. On this day, how many simchas, how many yahrzeits? How many prayers? The prayers—Esther caught her breath. She needed to make sure they had enough people to say Kaddish.

Yesterday, after the restaurant meal, there had been men enough, Lonnie and a handful of Stephen's uncles, that rabbi, for a minyan at the funeral home. But tonight, how many Jews might arrive by sunset for another prayer group, this last way the living might honor the deceased by raising their voices to the heavens in prayer? Ten, ten men minimum. Somehow, she would need ten good Jews to pray to God on Stephen's behalf one more time.

First, she thought to call Congregation Sinai; then, a twinge of guilt. How many years had it been since they'd ended their membership? Twenty? Since Lonnie's bar mitzvah, practically. Once Stephen retired, it settled the question; they no longer had the money.

But Stephen needed prayers tonight. And so don't think about the propriety of it, get out the phone book, call.

Six rings, seven, then just as she was about to give up, a man she assumed was a janitor, cleaning at this hour, finally answered. Esther explained her problem. The man murmured, "A minyan? You'll want men," and gave her the phone number of the brotherhood president. Hanging up, Esther dared hoped all might yet work out.

But the second call was, well, not good. When she'd asked the brotherhood president to round up enough men to "guarantee a minyan, please," the man had taken offense.

"I'd like to help you, but you're not a member of our congregation, this is Thanksgiving. We're not in the minyan business, you know," he'd growled and hung up.

"We're not in the minyan business." That had hurt. "What kind of business should a temple brotherhood be in, then?" she'd wanted to retort, but hadn't been able to get in a word. Maybe she shouldn't have said that word, "guarantee"? She could be too demanding. Stephen often warned that people wouldn't understand her style. But "We're not in the minyan business" had hurt the other way, she wanted to cry. Those words had made her even more desperate for guarantees, something.

Filled with panic, Esther's glance fell back to the paper. The article again, the library speaker, Daniel Lieber. Hadn't Lonnie known a boy with the name Danny Lieber, in temple youth group years earlier? The paper identified him as a local business consultant. Maybe he could help her. Maybe he knew other Jews in town.

Hardly considering the craziness, the chutzpah, she paged through the phone book for Lieber, called.

"Hello?" His voice on the line sounded kind, but curious. Who would call on a holiday?

"Hello, is this Daniel Lieber? Daniel, who used to be with Congregation Sinai Youth Group, oh, years ago?"

"Yes?"

Now she couldn't help herself. The tears came up through her lips, her words, just like the wetness had crawled into her boots yesterday. "This is Esther Storr. My son, Lonnie, was your friend. You used to go to the movies together on weekends, I chauffeured you there and back. I'm Lonnie's mother."

"Yes, yes, Mrs. Storr. I remember you." She breathed out in relief, the voice was still kind. "I'm surprised to hear, but—what can I do for you?"

And her story rushed out, the last 72 hours. Of how her husband had died, how Lonnie and his family had been in for the funeral, of course, but had to take a plane out last night, tough to get seats on the holidays. And now she was alone, you see, and frantic she wouldn't have enough men for a proper minyan at shiva. Of course, they knew many people, friends, but not as many Jews as when Lonnie was growing up, well, he could understand? So might he stop by at sunset, five o'clock tonight, for a few minutes? Help make the prayers?

"I-?" this man said back to her, but the word was a question, not an agreement, not yet. "I-Please hold on, Mrs. Storr."

Esther heard the crackle of his hand over the receiver, a muffle of words, presumably to a wife or children. And yes, dinner may be a bit earlier or later this year. But this is what we've done on Thanksgiving since the Pilgrims, we help our neighbors.... She was saying these words to herself anyway, her lips moving silently against her own receiver.

Another crackle before Daniel Lieber came back on the line. "What's your address, Mrs. Storr? We're having company tonight. But if I can get away, I will."

"I'd be grateful," Esther said, feigning calm. Only after she'd given her address and hung up the phone, did she try to convince herself she hadn't lost too much dignity in this call. So that was one. Somehow she had to find nine more, but who? Who, she wondered, looking past the kitchen into her dining room, would choose brisket over turkey for their Thanksgiving meal?

"We're not in the minyan business."
That had hurt.
"What kind of business should a temple be in then?"
she'd wanted to retort.

By three thirty, she couldn't bear the drowning sensation of preparing everything in lonely silence and put on the radio. Was it a sin to turn on the radio for company during mourning? Esther didn't have the courage to find out.

Hosts were pledging for some kind of food organization. And a caller came on the air to say, "Yes, Oxfam is one of the best, please give. When everyone else was too busy last year, Oxfam was there for me. It's not that people are thoughtless," he'd said in such an odd turn of phrase that Esther, folding table napkins, stopped to listen with care, "It's just they get busy and forget about people like us. So then we fall through the cracks even more."

It's just they get busy and forget about people like us. Esther gave another glance at the clock. It was nearly four. But the notice was in the paper, calls had been made. What else could she do? If they were going to come out for anyone, she assured herself, it would be Stephen. Didn't he love people and didn't they love him back? Even if the company had changed hands since he'd retired, and most local acquaintances were snowbirds.... People would come. "Are you settled in yet, Stephen?" she said loudly, trying to make a joke for someone's benefit, his? "If so, can you help me along?"

Her last task before people arrived, she had to dress. She went upstairs to their bedroom and opened their closets. A sweet smell of balsam cologne came up from Stephen's clothes to remind her of, well, everything. She supposed she could give them to Goodwill. Her glance fell farther; *but not the shoes.* The Jewish superstition made sense: do not pass shoes onto a living man or he might risk treading a dead man's path. Even without this prohibition, Esther guessed she'd be reluctant to part with her husband's gleaming leathers. It had been her job to shine his shoes, six pairs' worth, and she'd come to love the task. The biting smell of polish, the rough brush strap cutting into knuckles. Plus, this bit of effort kept her and Stephen, like the shoelaces themselves, laced and knotted, carrying on. Grateful, he would pour her a glass of wine at the kitchen table afterwards, then they'd sit, happily discuss his travel plans for the workweek ahead.

Now Stephen had taken his last trip, someone else had polished shoes for his lying-down. Now she was alone, her own best dress ready to be worn, and nothing more to do after these jobs. Nothing.

Suddenly Esther felt pain near her heart, a jab that sawed. It wasn't the terrible kind of pain that stole Stephen, but still, it frightened. That same sensations had come up on her at the restaurant yesterday, she realized. It had to be Stephen. Once by her side, now he'd come, literally, to rest inside.

Trying to ignore what came and went so fitfully, she gave her energies to putting on the simple black dress. When she leaned in to close the closet, she rested her left cheek upon the door's smooth planking and in this quiet, found herself feeling very tired all at once....

But then she heard the doorbell ring. People had come. It was time.

Esther opened her door to discover flakes of snow swirling and a young, bearded man wearing a parka, carrying a guitar case, on her steps. Under the light, Esther noticed he also wore a yarmulke.

Is this Daniel Lieber? she thought. But he looks younger than Lonnie.

The man smiled. "Mrs. Storr? I'm Rabbi Brummel, an associate rabbi at Sinai. You called the temple this morning, we spoke?"

"Please come in," Esther replied, startled, and stepped back in the hallway. "I, I'm just waiting for the others."

"Well, then," the stranger said, setting his guitar case down in the hall. "I'll be the first."

Esther nodded, but even as she moved to close the door, another voice called to her, "Wait!"

A second man was running up her walkway, wearing a corduroy jacket and red sweater underneath, gray pants, black boots. His face could hardly be glimpsed past a purple scarf covering his head. He came into the house, blowing on his bare hands.

"Mrs. Storr? I'm Daniel Lieber. I'm sorry I couldn't get here sooner, couldn't round up some others."

"Come in, come in," Esther murmured. Two men, more than she'd dared hope for this morning. But that meant how many more were needed? Seven? Eight?

In Esther's front hall, the three strangers shared shy, but curious glances, the same given over on elevators, blind dates, busy streets. Esther felt this, and so spoke quickly, to change the mood.

"Can I get you some coffee, tea?"

"No, I'm fine," Daniel said, stomping his wet soles against her rug. He unwrapped his scarf, revealed a fine head of hair, but didn't remove his boots.

The rabbi unzipped his parka. Underneath, Esther was glad to see, a tallis bag.

"Would you like something to eat?" she offered. "There's plenty."

The two men exchanged looks again, Esther was sure of it.

"I ate earlier," Daniel murmured.

"Well, of course," she said in automatic response. But then she thought it too; of course he's eaten.

She glanced away from the two men to her dining room, the long table stacked with brisket, rolls, vegetable platters, hot and cold. The entire buffet appeared to her busier, sloppier, somehow ridiculous in its largesse as she scrutinized it not with her usual eye for details, but as strangers might, entering her home for the first time.

How stupid, she thought. Why had she imagined anyone would be hungry on Thanksgiving eve?

"Mrs. Storr?"

She blinked to focus, turned back.

"It's nearly sunset," Rabbi Brummel said, cocking his head to the now-closed front door.

"Oh?" Esther struggled as she tried to think this through. "But there's not enough for a minyan. Can we wait a few minutes?"

"I'm afraid we can't push back a sunset, no."

"Please." Esther's hand fell to her side. Her hand opened to grasp at something, she didn't know what. The rabbi cleared his throat.

"Maybe," he said, "We won't do the Mourner's Kaddish. But together, we can still honor your husband. There are other prayers. Stephen, I believe you said, was his name?"

When she nodded, he smiled, pulled from his jacket prayer pamphlets and handed one to Daniel Lieber. As Daniel opened a page, started to read, Esther realized she should probably lead them to the living room. No matter what she wanted, they had come to say prayers. It was time.

In front of the fireplace, under the ceiling lights, the men bowed their heads and began, *"El mo-ley ra-cha-mim, sho-chain ba-m'ro-mim, ha-m'tzey m'nu-cho."*

As best she could, Esther tried to follow along. But she had not bothered with the ancient melodies for years, and her memory for chants was failing her; also, it seemed, she had failed with a Shiva set out for, what, only three people, after all. Three. *Oh Stephen, I'm sorry.*

"Ne-cho-nah tachas kan-fey hash-chi-no."

She'd failed because she was so tired, tired. She had worked, oh, for all these days. Ordered food, made phone calls, talked to the lawyers, doctors. Yet she hadn't minded any of it. Would cook a feast, clean a house, why, she would've grabbed a shovel and joined those diggers yesterday if they'd asked; anything, anything, to bring her husband where he needed to be. *I'm sorry, Stephen.*

"Mrs. Storr?"

For some reason, the rabbi was speaking to her, had interrupted his praying.

"Did I—was I not chanting correctly? Oh, I'm sorry. Please. Go on." She bit her lip, laced her fingers, to stop shaking she couldn't control.

"You have no reason to be sorry."

"There's only us."

"Not a problem."

"But—I don't know how to do this."

The rabbi leaned in until she could glimpse the fierce green light in his pupils. "No one does. Yet you've done well. Anyone can see how hard you've worked for his sake, Mrs. Storr,"

He paused, and to his gently probing glance, she finally gave in, volunteered, "Esther."

"Esther. All you could do for Stephen, you've done in beautiful ways. You haven't let him down." The rabbi reached out, touched her left hand, the ring finger. "Now. May we help you?"

Esther could barely muster a response to convey the gratitude she felt around such kindness. All she could manage was a nod. Still, the rabbi smiled as if he had received a gift. Into her open palm, he slipped a prayer pamphlet, then motioned for Daniel Lieber to step alongside.

"*El Moley Rachamim*—God full of mercy," he whispered.

As the two men bowed a second time, Esther unfolded the booklet with trembling hands, spied a section offering up transliterations.

"*Be-maal-os k'do-shim ut'ho-rim…*," she read out loud.

And not quite in harmony, yet held fast by the rabbi's strong tenor, three small voices joined. To lift prayers to the beamed ceilings of this house, the straddling sky, then, even farther. ■

Michele Merens is a Milwaukee-based writer and playwright.

AN UNQUIET REVOLUTION AT THE WATER COOLER

ILLUSTRATIONS BY KAREN STOLPER

RECENTLY LILITH BROUGHT TOGETHER A SMALL GROUP OF YOUNG WOMEN PROFESSIONALS WORKING FOR JEWISH NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS—in education, the arts, community building, global betterment. Here's who: Tehilah Eisenstat, 31, Lisa Exler, 30, Elyssa Gaffin, 32, Amy Greenstein, 32, Rebecca Kahn, 27, Naomi Korb, 27, Jennifer Gottleib*, 25, Anna Marx, 27, and Mel Weiss, 24. We wanted to see why this brainy and well-educated bunch choose to work where they do, and to hear their worries about time, money and the prospects for getting to the top.

What's strikingly new in what they so candidly reveal is that this cadre of women isn't complaining and getting out. Instead, they want the Jewish workplace to get better. Unlike talented women before them who might simply have voted with their feet—leaving Jewish organizations to enter the business world, or striking out on their own, or backing out of the workforce altogether—the women gathered around the Lilith conference table articulated pretty clearly what they need in order to stay. Working where their values lie is what most of them want—but not at the cost of their home lives, their financial security, or their sense of self-worth. ***LISTEN IN TO WHAT THEY'RE SAYING. AND TALK BACK AT LILITH.ORG.***

—SUSAN WEIDMAN SCHNEIDER

LILITH: So you all work in Jewish nonprofit organizations. How'd that happen?

NAOMI: I don't think anyone was too shocked that I ended up in the Jewish world. I have always been Jewey McJew Jew. [Laughter.] Tried to get away from it, went to college. The Orthodox community at Hillel at the University of Maryland had never had any formal female leadership, and I stepped up and eventually became the first female president of the community…a stepping stone toward a fellowship at Hillel International. When the company I next worked for folded, within a week I heard from six different Jewish organizations asking how they could help and whether they could offer me a job.

TEHILAH: I wouldn't have thought that I'd end up working in the Jewish world. I started out totally gung ho about writing, advertising, marketing, and meandered my way to Israel for a year, then came back and thought maybe I would meld marketing with my love for Israel, and that sort of led up into the Jewish communal world path.

Tomorrow I start working for Storahtelling. I am the new "Raising the Bar" program director. It's a bar- and bat-mitzvah program. [Laughter.] I was getting a Master's in midrash and a Master's in informal Jewish education and heard about this organization that does midrashic Jewish education and ended up doing volunteer consulting for them for some credits and found out that, lo and behold, there was funding for a position.

**A pseudonym*

ANNA: I'm an intern at JESNA. My father very much wanted me to take over the family business, which is computer programming; I wasn't interested. My mom wanted me to be a teacher like her; I wasn't interested.

ELYSSA: I'm the senior program officer at Natan; it's a group of young philanthropists who pool their money and give to innovative Jewish causes. We're a two-women operation—me and my executive director. I got my current job, word of mouth, through the Jewish community. It's a small, small world.

Is this something that my family or friends would have predicted? I think they would have thought I would have a job with more money and higher status, to be honest with you. I think I am a real disappointment. [Laughter.]

REBECCA: I grew up a Schechter kid, K through 12, and Ramah camp through and through. I took college as a little bit of a hiatus from total Jewish involvement; I kind of went to college to meet non-Jews. I was 18 and didn't know any. I started as a campus coordinator for the Jewish National Fund, and it has been four years….

LISA: In both professional and other parts of my life, I'm totally involved in the Jewish community. I am one of the *gabbais* [coordinators] of Hadar, a traditional egalitarian minyan on the Upper West Side, and that takes up all my time when I am not working.

LILITH: So this may be the moment to ask about work-life balance, and how you do it.

TEHILAH: Being married to an actor, I'm the first person to ask for family to come on to my insurance, and it blows my mind that I'm the first person in the organization to ever have needed this. In some ways, we're still stuck in the notion that this work is either for really wealthy people who are passionate about something and want something to do in their spare time or wives who need something to do when they're not with their kids. There's been a lot of growth in the communal world and places for women; great, but it's just steady climbing. We're already there, thinking about families and having kids, so the acceleration needs to occur faster.

ELYSSA: I have a son who is almost 2, and I am pregnant again. Most of the time, Jewish organizations' missions espouse the importance of family life, or Jewish children, continuity and yet they're like, "and here's three weeks' maternity leave and we'll see you soon!"

ANNA: At JESNA, they are unbelievably flexible with their employees. Many people in the office work from home once a week or more. The majority of employees are women, and there are women at every tier. Work life balance? Well, that comes in with the flexibility. They demand a lot of their employees, but they also give back a lot in terms of time, reward, and praise. I love it and I want to stay forever.

LISA: I decided to leave my old job at about the time when I found out that I was pregnant, and thought seriously about staying, because I thought, well, I'm going to go to this new job, and should I tell them that I'm pregnant in the job search process? It was pretty agonizing, but it worked out fine. AJWS has a great policy—parental-leave, and it applies to men and women.

These policies are something that they're very conscious of, and of wanting to be the leader in Jewish non-profit world in those areas. They've expanded rapidly, and have all of these young women working there who've just started getting married, and they're anticipating all these kids in the next few years, and figuring out how they want to deal with that, so I felt like I was really a test case for that. Because so many things there are so great, I'm still looking for the one thing I don't have, which is childcare. I guess my soapbox is for the Jewish non-profit world to organize employer-sponsored childcare. I work in midtown, and there are five or six other Jewish non-profits in a five block radius, and I'd really like to see them come together and start a daycare together. That's one of the biggest concerns about how I'm going to stay in this job—what am I going to do with my daughter when I'm at work?

ELYSSA: Nothing's going to happen with this until fathers stand up and say, "We want a work/life balance," and that these issues are important to them, too. These things get talked about as women's issues, but they're not women's issues, they're parents' issues.

LILITH: Do you have anyone at work, maybe women who are a little ahead of you on the track, who help you deal with this? Change this?

ANNA: I think mentorship is key. Mentorship and recruitment. Part of recruitment is making the job attractive to enough that people want to come and want to stay. That's a big part of

recruiting—changing what the position looks like so that the top talent wants to come in.

ELYSSA: Related to recruiting new people—often women who have been working there for a long time just don't get considered, and they feel they're undervalued not just by salary but also because their experience is overlooked. There's a lot of knowledge you gain when you've worked someplace for several years. When these young women say they're leaving for a better-paying job, management lets them slip away, not even bothering to make them a counter-offer. A lot of relationships these employees cultivated for the organization are lost, and the next person has to start all over. It's not good for the organization, and for the individual who leaves—even to go to what seems like a better job—it can feel heart-wrenching. Young professional women are very invested in the work they do.

I used to go home and cry about work. I'm never going to do it again.

If you put all that heart and soul into it, there's no way it can give it back to you. Unfortunately I had to learn that the hard way. It doesn't mean that I'm working less hard, but I'm just giving less of my heart to it.

"JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS' MISSIONS ESPOUSE THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY LIFE, OR JEWISH CHILDREN, CONTINUITY, AND YET THEY'RE LIKE, 'HERE'S THREE WEEKS' MATERNITY LEAVE AND WE'LL SEE YOU SOON!'"

JENNIFER: The internal structure at my organization is nothing to be proud of: a lot of male executives, a lot of female assistants sitting outside of their offices, a lot of pay discrepancies between women and men, between Jews and non-Jews, between people of color and white executives.

REBECCA: One of things I've learned about being a manager is to make sure that everyone always feels valued. This is a non-profit salary, so people have to love what they are doing, and they have to know that you love what they are doing. How do you bring them to the next level even if you can't give them the benefits of the dollar?

NAOMI: I would welcome every entry-level professional into the field with a package: a mentor several years ahead in a related position; a listing of all the relevant professional conferences; information about the field, three jobs that might appeal to you in the future, etc.

LILITH: But mentoring alone might not do it. What about the money issue?

LISA: I'm actually feeling very passionate about my old job teaching day school. That is one area where they actually don't have the money to pay talented people to stay.

MEL: I was at a lecture and an older woman came up to me and I introduced myself and she said "Very nice to meet you. How much do you make?" She explained she had been talking to the young women in her office and they were really upset that they weren't making enough to pay their rent. But there were no circumstances under which I was going to tell her how much I make—

ELYSSA: Why?

MEL: Because I didn't know her and it was an uncomfortable moment and I didn't know who she was. But that was an interesting moment. Another spark for our conversation tonight was when I went to a public event with a friend who works at a Jewish non-profit. She knew a lot of people there, not from her professional life—but from her night job as a restaurant hostess—her second job that was necessary for her to live.

TEHILAH: About sharing salary information...I was working at a place for several years and I guess I still had the Israeli mentality that you can speak about money. Americans don't speak about money, but Israelis do. What are you paying for rent? How much did you pay for that dress? Not a problem.

Somebody had wanted to join the organization that I was working for and she asked me what I got paid, and I told her. I got a call later that evening, saying that I should have been fired for what I did, that I had no right right to tell her, because they wanted to pay her less than a babysitter. We're working for Jewish organizations so I thought they valued honesty and *emet* and all of that crazy stuff. They were so good about so much else, and on this they threw me for a loop. I spoke to my friends who were further along in their careers and they all said I was an idiot, that you should never tell people how much you're making!

ELYSSA: I make $10,000 more per year now than I did in my first job, seven years ago, even though now I have my master's degree. When I switched to my new job I wanted more money and they gave me a hard time about it. They told me in a year we'll look over it again and have a conversation we'll see what happens when that year is up—cause by then you might be stuck, you might have another kid. I'm the person who does talk about money. If we don't talk about it how do you know that what you earn is right, or enough?

First of all, in the non-profit world, on your 990s you're supposed to list people's salaries, just the top five people—so at least you know. I talked about work/life balance, but several years from now I want to be a big shot rolling in the cash, and I want to be earning $200,000 a year which is really hard for me to imagine, and that's sad.

ANONYMOUS*: In my first job, I was working there for a while and then there was a promotion opportunity. I was preparing for hours to have this conversation with my really difficult boss at the time. I talked to a lot of people so I could find out what they were making—and it was really good that I did,

**For obvious reasons, some of these observations were off the record.*

because he lied to me about what people were making. It was ugly, but people take for granted that that's not spoken about so they take advantage of it.

TEHILAH: I'm realizing that by officially committing to work in the Jewish world I'm giving up any monetary marks of success, but it's something that I hope will help me change the world for the better.

I thought after getting two masters degree I wouldn't have any problem with salary—I'd just be looking for the perfect job. I got out of JTS with two degrees and my choices were get paid $20,000 less than I got the year before I left, and work nights and weekends, or take jobs that were higher up the totem pole and less engaging for me. That's the conundrum of staying in the Jewish world; the stuff that I find exciting is considered the straight-out-of-college, high-energy, program side where I'm never going to make any money. I don't want to move into the development portion of things, but how do I stay here?

"IN MY OPINION, IN A SOCIAL JUSTICE ORGANIZATION NOBODY SHOULD BE MAKING THAT MUCH MONEY."

JENNIFER: I negotiated my salary up only because I spoke to another disgruntled employee who left who said, whatever they offer you ask for more; they have it. If they want you, they'll give it to you. Play hardball and they'll play back. What bothers me more than the low entry-level salaries is the disparity, knowing how much the senior executives make and hearing that they offered the new administrative assistant an embarrassingly low salary and told her they didn't have more in the budget to give her.

In my opinion, a social justice organization shouldn't have that kind of disparity, and nobody should be making that much money in that kind of organization. I may be going against what a lot of you have said, but for me, Jewish Day School is not a priority, living on the Upper West Side is not a priority. I don't understand such high salaries in a social justice organization where we talk about raising money to do projects for low-income people.

ELYSSA: But the reality at the end of the day is that you're still running a business—non-profit or not—and you're going to try to get people for as cheap as you can. That's just what it is, if they're going to further what their mission is and at the end of the day help a lot of people. You can't expect people to work really hard and to get the kind of top talent unless you're willing to pay them. It's this whole idea that this is a non-profit, it's for the mission, so nobody should get paid. No, that's totally self-defeating. We have to insist on being paid what we're worth. Good people create success and they should be paid for it.

REBECCA: I also think men are much more aggressive where for us salary becomes slightly more emotional; I don't know why that is. When we're talking about numbers how is that emotional? But it is.

ANONYMOUS: I did negotiate but it was for so little. They really couldn't say we don't have that much in our budget because I know how much they've allotted for my programs. I see where I could find that money! [Laughter.] It's sad to me that that's the mentality. They know that we're here because we're committed to something.

NAOMI: Your pay should measure your performance and not how good you are at arguing for your salary. I'm not a highly aggressive person and I shouldn't earn a lower salary as a result.

ELYSSA: I ended up negotiating for better maternity leave. I said, "Our policies need to reflect our mission" And lo and behold, they came back to me with a much better deal which basically ended up with me with 10 weeks of paid maternity leave. Obviously I was very glad that I said something; always say something. All our organizations would go a lot further if they

truly embraced the Jewish values in how they ran the organization and asked themselves, what are we reflecting here?

LISA: I feel like something needs to happen in the community where every woman in an organization is empowered to walk in there and ask for what is the right thing, what she needs and what will make it possible for her to stay there in a comfortable way.

AMY: My jobs have been really dynamic and there are so many exciting and meaningful projects that I get to be a part of. At the same, sometimes I find myself fighting against falling into a pattern of creating unrealistic expectations for the people I manage, because I'm not always sure what is realistic when the bar is set so high for me and those around me. I think this stems from the fact that we care so much about what we do that it sometimes hard to know when to say when.

ELYSSA: But at the same time, you feel like, am I asking too much? Here I am asking to work one day from home, two days from home, and here I am asking for $10,000 more than I was making at my old job, but then again I have a Master's now and I didn't at my old job—it's hard. And I think women in the Jewish community suffer from the same thing that all women do, which is that it's hard for us to stand up and say, yeah, I'm worth it. I can do as much in four days as other people do in five and do it twice as well. Even though we're of this other generation, it's still difficult for me to puff up my chest and say I'm worth it. And, I don't feel like I'm hearing, "You're worth it!" I feel like in the for-profit world, you hear that more. There's this huge misconception that because this is the non-profit world, people shouldn't be making money. I'm going to go where they give me a good deal. If it's in the Jewish community, fantastic—I like helping the Jews, and I've given them a good part of my life for the last five-and-a-half years—and if it's somebody else, well, the Jews are going to lose out. And unfortunately, I feel like Jews really are losing out in a lot of places, because there's a real lack of trying to make it work for people who don't want to do the regular nine-to-seven.

ANONYMOUS: On the salary point, I don't know in my office if it's such a gender thing. I think there's a philosophy of get them while they're young, get a lot out of them, because they don't really know any better, and they're going to leave after a few years anyway, because they want to make more money. But this is what we need them for. So I don't think that's a gender thing, I think it's a philosophy about what to do with these energetic, optimistic, we-can-save-the-world, we-can-save-the-Jewish-people, right-out-of-college people.

ANNA: At the same time, even if it's not a conscious gender thing, I think that to young men who are coming out of school and looking for a career, it's a real turn off, the idea that this pays no money and works you to death and there's no status.

ELYSSA: One of my big pet peeves is Jewish organizations are populated with talented Jewish women and yet at the top of the organization there are men.

ANNA: We've spoken about men at the top tier, but what

HOW YOU CAN MAKE CHANGE

by SHIFRA BRONZNICK AND DIDI GOLDENHAR

As this eloquent discussion demonstrates, the challenges faced by women professionals in the Jewish workplace are both practical and profound. We believe that you can contribute to gender equity and positive change, no matter where you sit in your organization:

1) ACKNOWLEDGE THE IMPORTANCE OF GENDER EQUITY. The health of the Jewish community depends on retaining talented women professionals. While gender bias persists in most Jewish organizations, these young women praise the agencies that recognize the link between enlightened human resource policies and high performance standards. Take note of best practices and urge your organization to replicate them.

2) CLOSE THE GAP BETWEEN JEWISH VALUES AND JEWISH PRACTICE. Jewish organizations can align their espoused values with their policies by supporting flexibility, parental leave, job sharing and affordable daycare.

3) INTEGRATE CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND GENDER EQUITY. In other sectors, mentoring and sequenced career programs have helped women advance to leadership. Jewish organizations lag behind the curve, and given other gender-based obstacles, this affects women disproportionately. How can your organization promote career development?

4) BREAK THE TABOO AROUND MONEY. Advocating for greater transparency around salary structures will compel organizations to rethink their assumptions about how professionals are compensated, especially along gender lines.

5) PRACTICE NEGOTIATION SKILLS. Negotiation can be more challenging for women, especially where we are mission-driven and expected to set our own needs aside. Fair pay based on merit should become a norm. Negotiation is a process: find out what your job is worth, prepare your presentation and practice with a confidante.

6) BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND ALLIANCES. Advancing gender equity can begin in your living room, the local coffeehouse, or the conference room. But deep organizational change is difficult: threatening the status quo is likely to meet with resistance. Don't go it alone. Build relationships and cultivate allies—across generations and across the professional-volunteer divide—to build a Jewish community where women and men share leadership.

Bronznick and Goldenhar are co-authors, with Marty Linsky, of Leveling the Playing Field: Advancing Women in Jewish Organizational Life. *For more on the book, and for other resources from Bronznick's groundbreaking work at Advancing Women Professionals and the Jewish Community, go to www.advancingwomen.org*

we sort of brushed past is that there are no men at the bottom tier. That's really problematic. I think diversity benefits everybody everywhere you go.

ELYSSA: I think that men are seen as more of a rare commodity—especially young men, because as you can see, there aren't a lot of young men. There are a lot of older men, so I don't know where the young men are, exactly, but they're not working their way up the ranks. They're coming in from the outside.

DATING AND OTHER LIFE CHOICES

ANONYMOUS: I'm not married. But when I'm dating, unfortunately salary is something I have to think about, because I want my kids to go to a day school, I want them to go to camp, and I don't want it to be an issue every time we want to do something Jewish, which tends to cost a lot of money. And I feel shallow that this has to be part of my thinking when I meet someone, but otherwise I have to reconsider my career. I don't think that a person in my profession can marry somebody else in my profession, if they want to give their child the kind of lifestyle I had growing up.

ELYSSA: My real passion is in international development, and I would have really loved to pursue that, but you have to spend a ton of time in the field, and out of all the women I knew in international development, none had children and only a handful were married. And I decided I wanted to have a family, which I didn't tell the guy I was dating at the time, because that might have frightened him a little bit, but we got married and we have a family. For me, the priority right now is for a good work/life balance, so where I'm going to be in five years is wherever offers me an opportunity to have that. That's, to me, what's most important.

I know I'm very lucky to have a husband who makes more than three times what I do. I certainly couldn't have married a man who works in the Jewish community, because we wouldn't be able to afford to live in New York and have a family. I don't know how people do it, to be honest with you. If, for example, my husband had some kind of crisis of conscience and decided he wanted to save the world, I'd be up a creek.

TEHILAH: I married an actor, which is sort of like marrying someone in the non-profit world. So you're thinking, what are we going to do when we have kids? Since we're not bankers and lawyers we have the kind of flexibility you want with kids, but we can't afford to have kids attend day school, which is a huge point of contention cause we both grew up going to Jewish day schools. Either you invest yourself or your kids in Judaism. That's the choice.

ELYSSA: That reminds me of another problem I have—I work in the Jewish community, but I don't think I'd be able to afford to send my child to Jewish day school. And I hope to have multiple children—more than two, even—and I'd like to be able to send them all to summer camp. And if we can't take care of our own—well, what kind of message does that send? It's cost-prohibitive right now to work for the community and pay for your child to be a part of it.

JENNIFER: There's been a lot of talk about Jewish continuity and babies and marriage. For your demographic purposes...I'm queer, and that doesn't really speak to me. I'm queer and the issues that affect the queer Jewish community are invisible in this space.

I feel like there are all these other issues that I deal with as a queer person. When I think about dating I can't think about just salary issues. For instance, for transgender people there are real worries—all the time—about whether they'll even be able to get a job at all. So I feel there is a whole other group of issues not being addressed here.

MEL: Being out at work is a huge deal for people. What do you do if you are in a Jewish organization?

JENNIFER: The truth is I would never interview at an organization where I would hesitate about coming out at my interview. I wouldn't be interested in working for an organization like that, I am pretty sure.

THE JEWISH SOAPBOX

AMY: I grew up in Long Island in a very affluent Jewish town. My family lived on the wrong side of the tracks. I didn't grow up going on vacation all the time and I didn't get a car when I was 16. I don't know if this plays out for other people; I do think it's connected to the fact that when I was thinking about what kind of career I wanted, I never thought about salary. Placing a lot of importance on money was too loaded for me. Once I'm in my job, I'm thinking about it.

> **"I WANT MORE JEWISH VALUES IN OUR JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS—ACROSS THE BOARD, FROM WHAT TOILET PAPER WE BUY TO INSURANCE AND HIRING PRACTICES."**

When I went to my ten-year high school reunion I looked on the list that said where people worked, and out of a hundred people on the list three of us were working in non-profit. Everyone else was lawyers, bankers or any other stereotypes for Jews you can think of.

TEHILAH: My main soapbox is we're working for Jewish organizations and Jewish values get discarded when it comes to money. I want more Jewish values in our Jewish organizations across the board, from what toilet paper we buy to the insurance and hiring policies. We have great missions and great people and I just want the Jewish values to be woven in all the way through.

WHERE'S THE MIDDLE GENERATION?

REBECCA: I think it's interesting, you know—I look around my office, and I'm starting get near the older end. There's just this huge gap between the 20s and the 40s, and there are very

few people—men or women—in their 30s in my organization. Some are leaving for motherhood or for their husbands, and some are leaving for the for-profit sector or to go back to grad school, but there is a real lack of people in their late 20s and 30s. I don't know where I'll be in five years, because there's almost no one in my office in their 30s.

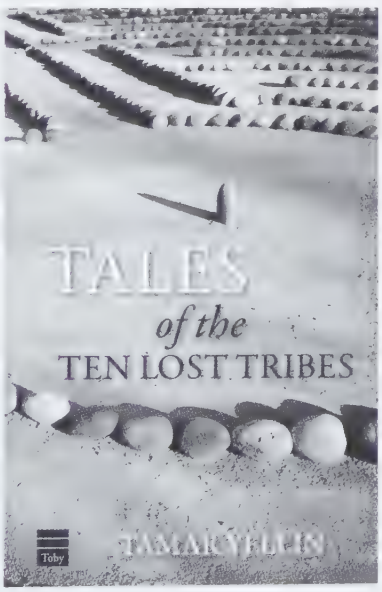
"RIGHT NOW, YOU CAN'T WORK IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY AND AFFORD TO PAY FOR YOUR CHILD TO BE A PART OF IT."

MEL: If you want to be part of a big Jewish community you're going to have to live in an urban area and you're probably going to have to pay a lot more for your rent or your mortgage than if you were living in the rest of the country. But what do you do when the Upper West Side is one of the most expensive neighborhoods in New York City, or in the country? How much of this are you willing to accept as "this is where the jobs, are so this is where I'm going to live" versus this is ridiculous. Is living where all the Jews are a value or a problem?

TEHILAH: If once you reach those higher twenties and thirties, you're going to leave the organization, you won't be able to give all of your information to the person after you. What is that saying? To me that says that their programming isn't the most important stuff going on there—but that's not what the organization would say out loud.

ANNA: I've seen the other side to this story. Organizations that believe in hiring top talent. And it's seen as a catastrophe when someone good leaves.

NAOMI: You know, when you enter this field—sometimes through a fluke, because your first entry level job out of college is with your youth group in your hometown—you're not looking at it as a career path and envisioning where can you go from there, whereas people who jump into investment banking have that ladder laid out for them. The Master's programs in our field are beginning to lay out the trajectory, but we're still behind. And we still don't talk the talk. We don't work to 'sell' Jewish communal work. We don't regard it highly enough and we don't promote the field as a professional industry. There's a lot of apologetic rhetoric around it, like "Well, it's a really flexible lifestyle, and we enjoy it," rather than showing pride in the Godly work we do and the brilliant and talented colleagues with whom we're lucky to work. ■



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A Trek from Catholicism

by MARIAN NASH

The baptismal records at a church in New Jersey have a certificate showing that on July 5, 1969, my Jewish father converted to Catholicism. My family has always kept this quiet, our mother teaching us to be sensitive to the feelings of those who would find this a betrayal. When my mother and father married in 1957, he was a non-practicing Jew, and she was a devout Catholic. Without question, my parents knew that their children would be raised in her faith. Twelve years into the marriage my father died, leaving my mother and six children behind. Twenty-five years later, the silence around my father's conversion would lead to the sounding call of my own voice as a Jewish woman.

While living in Utah in my early thirties and dealing with the loss of a dear friend, I turned toward Judaism for solace. A non-practicing Catholic, I could have turned to Catholicism, but when I had tried this in my twenties—joining others in prayer groups or reading the New Testament before bed—I felt disconnected.

The idea of practicing Judaism came to me after my older brother David, who lived in Utah as well, mentioned having attended a few synagogue services. I stood in his kitchen dumbfounded. I didn't know there were any Jews in Utah, the state known for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Mormons. There were 650.

The following Friday, I went to Congregation Kol Ami with a friend from work. Ghosts of my father and his brother, Al, seemed to stand before me on the *bimah*, the raised platform from which worship services are led. The President of the Board stood a full six inches shorter than Rabbi Wengar, who was leading the service. My Uncle Al had stood the same size alongside my father, who had been tall and had a full head of hair, like Rabbi Wengar. Uncle Al had been my height, tall for a woman, below average for a man, with thinning red hair. Before cancer had ravaged his body, he was round, as was the President of the Board. Rabbi Wengar had full lips like my father and the same easy smile. My eyes darted back and forth between the two of them; a cache of memories and mourning stuck in my throat.

I began going alone to the Saturday services. Before this, I had never heard the song of Hebrew: I was washed over by a river without bottom. Too shy to join the *oneg Shabbat*, the informal gathering after Sabbath services, I would drive directly home and lie in bed with my thoughts humming. My favorite melody turned out to be that of the *Shma*, the revered prayer which declares God's Oneness: Listen, Israel, Adonai our God is One. It is the first prayer I learned in Hebrew: *Shma, Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Ehad.* I was in wonder at these words, since they were the last of the rabbinic scholars in past centuries burned alive while wrapped in Torah scrolls, and upon the lips of those about to enter the gas chambers. On Shabbat, as the summer sun rested on the edge of my bed, I would repeat the *Shma* in my mind and be soothed.

Sitting in synagogue over the following weeks, I brimmed with a remembered awareness of myself. I loved the sounds and the prayers; thankful for life in spite of loss. I swam in an inarticulate homecoming, as I took unpaid days off from work to celebrate the High Holy Days, light-headed from fasting, but filled with a sense of having reached the brink of myself, then going beyond into a forgiveness that dissolved any sense of separation between me and another. I began reading books that opened me up to the world of Judaic rituals and five-thousand-year-old traditions. I discovered the instruction to probe, and this was where I swam most freely: questioning. I didn't worry that my feet didn't touch the bottom, that I was treading with no end in sight. I was buoyant within the waters of Judaism.

I found that my mother and I were able to celebrate my father's family without having to deconstruct her spiritual foundation. In our phone conversations, I would tell her how Judaism felt like a Return for me. I'd ask her what she would think if I converted, and she'd say, "I married a Jewish man, why would I mind having a Jewish daughter?"

Soon after, though, my viewpoint on conversion changed considerably. One day after services, I was sitting on my bed reading a book on Judaism. Fall was stepping into Utah. The leaves outside my window were turning color; a gentle breeze lifted the curtains. The author, a rabbi, suggested to the people who were searching for meaning within religion to go back to the one in which they were raised, reasoning that the fundamental practice of most religions was the same: Love thy neighbor as thyself. He didn't believe it was necessary to travel down a completely new road to find one's meaning or solace. I lowered the book, surprised by the sense of relief washing over me: I was being given permission to keep our family

secret in the closet. All I would have to do is turn back toward Catholicism and then The Apostate, my father, could remain there in the dark.

For years, my father's act—renouncing Judaism—had pressed the air like wings in my mind. I was always warned by my mother not to release it to anyone Jewish for fear of it seeming a slap on the face, rather than breezy conversation. Her warning was justified. Once, at a poetry reading, I was talking with an elderly Jewish man and I mentioned that my paternal grandfather had changed our family name from Geltzeiler to Nash. The gentleman's face fell and I was unable to lift it to an understanding that my grandfather did this for the safety of his children. I was told that he had dragged his finger down page after page of the phone book to find a generic last name so my father and uncle could go to school: with a new last name, they would be safe from endangering connections to the Geltzeiler cousins who were bootlegging in Newark, New Jersey. Regardless, my grandfather became, in this man's eyes, a Jew to be ashamed of. I didn't understand; I did not grow up learning about my heritage this man was mourning over: After my father died, we lost all touch with his side of the family. It was after this encounter that the shame surrounding my family's name change slid a bolt across the closet harboring the secret about my father finding Jesus.

I put the book back on the shelf in the living room. I decided that with a past that could lead to judgment and controversy in the future within the Jewish community, I would take the option not only to step away from Judaism, but make my way back to Catholicism. I would seek to recall the cool water of my baptism slipping over my forehead; receive the communion wafer as the Son of God; confess my sins in Confession. This way, I could continue to hold the secret within me, deem myself powerless to speak for a man in his dying days: My father converted to Catholicism six months before he died, and was buried in a Catholic cemetery in New Jersey with my mother's name and birth date chiseled in the stone alongside his, waiting for the date when she joined him.

> She'd say, "I married a Jewish man. Why would I mind having a Jewish daughter?"

Ensconced in judgment and shame, I watched the door of reason slowly close in my mind. While I knew that I had sat in synagogue and whispered to my forebears, "I hear you when I speak," I told myself I'd be able to have Christmas and Nat King Cole, multi-colored lights on freshly fallen snow, children anticipating Santa Claus—if I simply placed my hands over my ears. I'd be able to stand alongside my family at Mass and welcome the sound of their song in my heart. I'd be able to rest on Sundays, along with the rest of the country. I would be able to remain in step, get along, and keep quiet.

Some weeks later, in the dark of a December morning, tree branches crackling under the burden of ice, I put the last few things into my packed car for my return to New Jersey. It was time to go home. Beneath a sky pierced with stars, I began my drive over the Rockies and across the Mississippi. Resettled, I began attending Mass and studying what I tried to believe was the dormant Catholicism within me. Before a year was out, I found myself without a religion.

I was in church one Sunday, and on the altar was a child in the arms of her family; she was being baptized. As I was reciting a prayer in perfect step with the congregation, enjoying the ease with which I was remembering the dance of kneeling and standing and sitting and responding throughout the service, the words suddenly stopped rolling out of my mouth and into the collective pool of belief: I did not believe in the sacrament of Baptism, "...unless we be born again of water and the Holy Ghost we can not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, as Truth Himself told us."

The congregation created a soft sound of rolling thunder through the church as we all sat down again. I looked at the people around me; I did not believe a single child would be shut out from God if she wasn't baptized.

I walked back down the marble stairs as a member of the church for the last time.

For awhile, I was without a religious identity, until I realized that if I were to have children I wouldn't raise them anything but Jewish. With this quiet, simple knowingness, I fully recognized myself as a Jewish woman. Two years later, I converted with my mother's blessings. Five more years would pass before I'd have the fortitude to disclose my father's conversion to anyone but my closest intimates. For the rest of my life I will yearn for the intricacies of my father's journey toward July 5, 1969. ■

Marian Nash lives in New York City. This piece is excerpted from her manuscript-in-progress, The Morning of My Judaism: An Exploration of the Jewish Morning Prayers.

Lonely at the Table

Some converts come to Judaism missing one thing: a Jewish family.

by DARCY R. FRYER

WHEN THE JEWISH MONTH OF ADAR BEGINS, JOY COMES IN... or so the saying goes. Not for me. When Adar begins, anxiety sets in, and it has nothing to do with pre-Passover cleaning. It's the annual problem of finding a place—two places, actually, one per night—so that I'm not alone for the Passover seders.

A decade ago, I converted to Judaism. For eleven months of the year, this is a non-issue in my Upper West Side (Manhattan) Jewish community. Converts are as common as blackberries in liberal synagogues these days, and my plight isn't that different from that of friends who grew up as non-observant Jews and then adopted, as adults, a more religious lifestyle. Most of the time, being a convert simply means being a Jew; it's easy and lovely blending in.

As a single convert, I have no Jewish family. This isn't a great hardship on most holidays. On the High Holidays, I *daven* where I please, mindful of my good fortune. (Several friends have told me about miserable years they spent praying at shuls their families loved but they couldn't tolerate.) On Shavuot and Sukkot, I happily join old friends for days of festive reunion. Shavuot is the holiday most commonly associated with conversion; Jews read the Book of Ruth, the story of Judaism's most famous convert. Shavuot is, in many ways, the perfect holiday for converts: maximum time in shul, maximum emphasis on community; minimal time at home, and minimal need for family. The High Holidays are wonderful for similar reasons. During much of the year, a patched-together "family" of friends functions just as well as a family of blood relations.

Passover, though, is different. Of all the Jewish holidays, it's the most home-centered, and even non-observant Jewish families tend to celebrate it. It's the holiday when relatives who see little of each other during the rest of the year gather in large groups. The seders take center-stage, and synagogue services, by contrast, are poorly attended. Of course, it's possible to sign up for synagogue-based seders—I've been to quite a number—but even the best ones sit wrong at heart.

Every year as I watch my Jewish-by-birth friends flit off to seders with parents, grandparents, or distant relatives with whom they would scarcely dream of spending Shavuot or Yom Kippur, I am painfully reminded of the one thing that is missing from my Jewish life: a Jewish family.

Family seders are not intrinsically better than institutional seders; in fact, in ten years I've attended some thoroughly unsatisfying ones. I've been to seders fraught with tension because not all in attendance want to read the Hagaddah; I've been to ones where the story of great-aunt Gertrude's hip replacement replaces the story of the Jews leaving Egypt. I've been to seders so big that I was never introduced to half the people present, and to family-oriented ones that were so family-oriented there was little room for anything else.

WHAT MAKES A FAMILY SEDER SPECIAL, REALLY? In the end, it has little to do with the rituals, food, or the quality of the discussion. *It's special because one automatically belongs, one doesn't have to ask for an invitation.* As someone who doesn't have a biological Jewish family, I am keenly aware of how the biblical tale itself revolves deeply around themes of household, hearth and family: The babies slain or not slain; the bread not rising on the family hearths; the four children of the Hagaddah.

And, of course, there are rituals of Pesach hospitality. *Ma'ot chittim*—the charity specifically earmarked for Jews who can't afford Passover food—and the injunction in the Hagaddah to "let all who are hungry, come and eat" both focus on quenching physical hunger, not loneliness. Family seders may be jolly, learned, rambunctious, disputatious, warm, or bleak, but *they are always inclusive.* I imagine parents and grandparents checking that everyone is coming, corralling not just children but the middle-aged. No one has to ask if she may come.

For converts without Jewish family, the annual Passover anxiety arrives in Adar, the Jewish month that begins our perennial uncertainty. Where and with whom will we spend the seders? How long to wait for an invitation? Whom to ask. How to ask. When to ask. Whether to "settle" for a synagogue seder, or to drive on a holiday when car travel is proscribed. I have never been homeless on the first or second night of Pesach. The Jewish community has always come through for me, often splendidly. But much of the hospitality is extended at the last minute, and there's no continuity from one year to the next.

I am waiting for the Adar when I hear the rabbi preach about finding spiritual meaning in the insecurity of not knowing where one will be for the first seder. I am waiting for the Adar when I hear congregants consulting one another about the intricacies of inviting oneself to someone else's seder, and whether it's wiser to ask a close friend, who will feel obliged, or a more distant acquaintance, who won't.

After all, finding a place at the seder table is supposed to be the easy part. ■

Darcy R. Fryer is a teacher and historian. She lives in New York City.

A Mormon-Jewish Burial

Why Not?

by AMY WALL

MY FATHER DIED OF A HEART ATTACK AT 81. I was relieved. Our relationship had been difficult; knowing that it was over at last was good news.

When I was young, my father spent a lot of time teaching me—reading, mathematics, fixing cars. He approved of me; maybe he even loved me. But when I entered puberty, everything changed. Embarrassed by my blossoming body, he made sure I was embarrassed, too. He found a variety of clever ways to do this. He read my diary, with its junior-high-school crushes, out loud at the family dinner table. ("Oh Rodney, such blue eyes you have!") When I went out with friends he hollered out the front door, "Amy! Did you remember to wear a bra?" He called me "Crisco" ("Fat-in-the-can, get it?"). I loved and admired my father, and having him treat me this way was astonishingly painful.

I worked hard to get back into his good graces, becoming a straight-A student, joining Honor Society, even studying science to please him. Nothing worked. But by the time I finished high school, he had tired of the shame game. I was no longer an object of ridicule; I was just invisible.

In turning away from me, my father turned toward my brother, Eddie, and all the family dynamics changed. My mother had long ago selected my brother, Eddie, as her child-of-choice; now he was both parents' favorite child. The three of them were a family; I was a guest.

WHEN I WAS 25, EDDIE FELL IN LOVE WITH A GIRL WHO AGREED TO MARRY HIM IF, AND ONLY IF, HE CONVERTED TO MORMONISM. I guess if we'd been "real" Jews, this would have been out of the question. We were all born in New York, but the family moved to Arizona when I was five and Eddie was three. There was a thriving Jewish community here, but my parents made no effort to connect with it. We thought of ourselves as Jews, and our blue-and-white holiday gifts sat under a Hanukkah bush.

But blue-and-white wrapping paper was no match for true love. Eddie converted without a heartbeat of hesitation. Soon after, my mother's many Mormon friends persuaded her to dip into the baptismal pool herself. At her insistence, my father grudgingly agreed to convert with her.

My mother was happy, surrounded by new friends and busy with church activities. My father, however, raised in a Jewish orphanage in New York, thought of himself as a Jew, and the baptism worried him. Then a rabbi told him that as far as Judaism was concerned, the conversion had been meaningless. "You can't give away your Judaism," the rabbi said. Reassured, my father allowed himself to be lured to Mormon functions by homemade brownies and ice cream.

I was deeply confused by what felt like religious musical chairs. Did people change religions as easily as that? I had never heard of such a thing. And I was angry with my parents for what felt like another abandonment, not to mention blindly following Eddie. When we met for occasional family dinners, we were tense and barely polite.

ABOUT A YEAR AFTER HER CONVERSION, MY MOTHER'S BISHOP SENT HER A LETTER SAYING THAT GETTING HER DAUGHTER TO CONVERT WAS NOW HER LIFE'S WORK. Yes, really—I saw this letter myself. Immediately, my mother bent her considerable energies upon me. She gave me a Book of Mormon, which I was supposed to read. She'd check on it when she came to my house, so I thumbed the pages to make it look handled. At her insistence, we attended church functions together. I learned a lot of useful stuff: canning and drying food, baking bread, making jams and jellies.

I was deeply confused by what felt like religious musical chairs. Did people change religions as easily as that?

The cooking classes were fun, and I was enjoying my mother's company. Honestly, I did think about converting. I mean, why not? My mother would love me forever. My brother and his wife would be delighted. My father would continue to ignore me. What was the downside?

The downside was that I just could not do it. I was a Jew.

My mother couldn't accept that. The pressure intensified. Other people from her church, including my new sister-in-law, joined my mother in explaining that Jesus was indeed Our Lord and Savior. An entire throng, singing a hallelujah chorus, cornered me whenever I accompanied my mother to her church.

I GUESS IT WAS THIS PRESSURE THAT GOT ME UP EARLY ONE SATURDAY MORNING TO GO TO SERVICES AT A SYNAGOGUE. I didn't understand a word, but I liked it. I went again. I took classes and learned to read Hebrew. Eventually, I married a nice Jewish dentist and kept kosher. I joined the women's *chevra kadisha,* the "holy society" that helped prepare dead Jewish women for burial.

Again, the family dynamics shifted. My father, it turned out, liked having Judaism in the family. He came to my home for celebrations, wearing a blue kippah that I'd gotten for him. I hoped our Judaism would mend the rift. It didn't, though he clearly enjoyed being part of a religious Jewish family. My mother, furious, told me her church sisters were her real family, and buried herself in her church.

WHEN MY MOTHER WAS 66 YEARS OLD, SHE WAS DIAGNOSED WITH CANCER, AND GIVEN SIX MONTHS TO LIVE. Hatchets suddenly vanished. I was 42, raising two kids and managing my husband's dental practice, but I cooked and cleaned for my mother, took her to doctor's appointments, visited her twice a day in hospice, and sat with her through the night she died. We never discussed what had happened between us, never talked about what had driven her to Mormonism and me to Judaism, never expressed regret at the way our paths had separated us.

My mother was buried as a Mormon. Sisters sang hymns, Brothers carried the casket, and there was ham and sweet potatoes at the church afterwards. She lies in the Mormon cemetery, in an unspoiled patch of desert on the outskirts of town, under a large mesquite tree. I hated every bit of it—the hymns, the ham, the service.

AFTER MY MOTHER'S DEATH, I WAS CERTAIN MY FATHER WOULD FINALLY NEED ME IN HIS LIFE. I hurried to be helpful: I stocked his freezer with matzoh ball soup, helped him with his bills, cleaned his house. None of it mattered. Our few conversations were about his medical conditions. I was sad, then angry, and finally resigned. He lived for another eight years, eight years of tense silence between us.

After he died, I realized Eddie and I had never discussed Dad's funeral. I didn't know if Eddie thought of Dad as a Mormon, which was technically correct from the Mormon standpoint, or as a Jew, which was technically correct from the Jewish standpoint. My father had left no instructions. When asked, he'd shrugged and said, "Like I care?"

We called the funeral home that had buried our mother eight years earlier, and made an appointment. When Eddie and I arrived at the funeral home, Bob, who helped us with Mom's funeral, was there. He remembered us, he said, and was sorry for this new loss. He spread out some papers, folded his hands on the table and looked up.

It's a small town. Bob knew my family and knew the score.

Eddie and my parents had converted from Judaism, I had not; my mother was an avid Mormon, my father was not. It was a complicated mess, and the three of us looked at each other, not sure where to begin.

I broke the silence. "Look, Dad wasn't much of a Jew, but he wasn't much of a Mormon, either."

"No, Dad was definitely not a Mormon," Eddie agreed, leaning back in his chair. "But we are burying him next to Mom, right? We're not putting him in a different cemetery?"

"Right," I said. My father had a pre-paid plot in the Mormon cemetery, right next to my mother.

Eddie paused. "You'd like Dad to have a Jewish service, wouldn't you?" Now it was out in the open; good.

I answered matter-of-factly. "Yes, but no rabbi will conduct a Jewish service followed by a Mormon burial. No, we'll have to do something secular, but we can say *kaddish* at the graveside."

"Say what?"

"Uh—a prayer for the dead." I've always been astounded by my brother's total ignorance of all things Jewish.

"Will it be in Hebrew?"

"No. It's in Aramaic."

"Can it be in English?"

"It can be in English after it is in Aramaic."

"OK." He paused. "You read it in Aramaic and I'll read it in English."

With that, a truce seemed to have been declared. I wasn't asking for anything too Jewish, Eddie wasn't asking for anything too Mormon, so we were both comfortable. We reached rapid agreement—Dad would not be embalmed, there would be no motorcycle escort. The plain pine box turned out to be surprisingly pricey, so we went for the cheaper box, made out of recycled pantyhose or something.

Bob was taking notes. He looked up and said, "Your Dad wasn't wearing any clothes when he was brought in. Can you bring something?"

The right answer would have been, "Sure, pants and a nice shirt, first thing in the morning." Instead, I said, "No, he'll be buried in a shroud, and he'll have a *tahara*, a ritual washing. Which I will do." I will?

Eddie had been leaning back in his chair and it thumped on the carpet.

"YOU are going to do it?"

"I am." I am?

"Why?"

"Because I, well, I need to." I had been a member of the *chevra kadisha* for years, and had certainly buried people I knew. But I had never buried a man. I had never buried my father.

"Amy, wouldn't it be very hard for you?"

"Lori can help me." Eddie was now married to Lori—Janice (the Mormon girl who started it all) having divorced my brother years ago for a foot-stomping Baptist. Lori, a fundamentalist Christian raised to believe that the earth is flat, was fascinated by anything relating to sickness and death. If she weren't such a nice, wholesome person, you'd wonder what was wrong with her.

Eddie put his elbows on the table, leaned his forehead against his hands and sighed. "Okay. If you want to do this, fine. I'm sure Lori will be thrilled."

I turned to Bob, the funeral director. "Can you get us a shroud?"

He scribbled industriously on his forms. The meeting was over. Eddie and I walked, together, down the carpeted hallway. I said, "Thanks for not forcing another Mormon service down my throat."

We walked through the wide glass door into the sunlight. It was August. The heat settled over our faces, an airless blanket, and we were silent for several seconds—there's always a brief adjustment in Tucson when you go from 72 degrees to 110.

"I don't think Dad would have liked it," Eddie said.

I SPENT THE EVENING SEARCHING THE INTERNET, LOOKING FOR RELIGIOUS PRECEDENT: CAN A DAUGHTER PERFORM A *tahara* FOR HER FATHER? The pages I got were unequivocal and uncompromising: No. It's immodest.

At 3:00 a.m., I'm sleepless and scared. Can this possibly be the right thing to do? Why am I putting myself through this? It's not like we had any sort of real relationship. By dawn, all I could answer was this: I think I need this last contact with my father. I need to bind us together as Jews. My father was a Jew and should be buried as one.

I PULLED UP TO THE MORTUARY IN MY LITTLE RED RAV. Lori was waiting. She helped me unload one small yellow bucket and two blue mop buckets from my car, and we walked in together. Bob escorted us through a back door into the working area of the mortuary. The solemn, carpeted world vanished behind the door, replaced by linoleum tile, industrial-size sinks, stainless steel counters and giant refrigerators. The stench of antiseptic was everywhere.

> I'd been emotionally iced up for almost three-quarters of an hour. That was the good news. The bad news was that I was starting to melt.

Bob led us to a large room with two stainless steel sinks on one side and a long stainless steel counter on the other. In the center of the room there was a large white table. Somebody was lying on it, covered with a white sheet. I stopped abruptly and Lori bumped into me.

I walked forward slowly and lifted the sheet. My father's face was frozen, tufts of gray hair in mad disarray, mouth wide, eyes open, staring straight up at me. My arm dropped, the sheet slid down his chest. Whatever made me think I could do this? What insane audacity, what perversity of character possessed me to

volunteer for this? I actually felt faint.

I took a deep breath and pulled the sheet back over my father's face. "Bob," I said. "I need surgical scrubs, towels, sheets and the shroud."

Bob was efficient. He handed me two sets of scrubs and a rectangular brown paper package, then opened a cabinet under the counter, revealing neat stacks of white linens. I took out sheets, towels and washcloths. Bob hoisted himself onto one of the Formica counters.

"Bob, you can go, we're fine."

"No, I'm required by law to stay here."

"I've done a hundred *taharas*, and no one from the funeral home has ever watched." "Well, I want to see this," he admitted.

I scowled. "I've done a hundred *taharas*, and no one from the funeral home has ever watched."

"Well, I want to see this," he admitted.

Great. Could this get any harder? I showed Lori how to wear surgical scrubs, tucking hair up, putting scratchy paper masks over mouths and noses. I peered at the box of gloves, size medium.

"Don't you have smaller ones?" I complained to Bob.

"No, that's it."

I yanked the too-big latex gloves over my hands and reached for another pair. "Double glove," I told Lori, "in case one rips, you're still protected." We filled my small yellow bucket with warm water from the sink. My hands were shaking.

"Okay, I'm going to take the sheet all the way off; then we need to get a clean sheet under him, and then look for sores or bleeding."

"Right," Lori said, her voice high and strained. This was Lori's first dead body. It was also her father-in-law.

I pulled away the sheet, dropped it onto the cement floor, and kicked it under the table. Dirty linens were Bob's problem.

Made self-conscious by last night's Internet search, I averted my face and quickly put a towel over my father's genitals. I grabbed a sheet from my stack of linens, and handed it to Lori. "Open the sheet and stuff it under him when I tell you," I said.

I crossed his legs at the ankles so he'd roll more easily, put my arms around his shoulders, cradled his head to my chest, and rolled him to one side. He was ice-cold, stiff, just out of the fridge.

"Okay, bring the sheet."

I stood up, looked at my father's body and was shocked. He looked like a skeleton covered in yellow leather. My God. How could I not have known?

I DID NOT KNOW THE PRAYERS FOR THE MEN'S *tahara*, SO I WAS MAKING UP MY OWN, PRAYING IN MY MIND, STEADILY, WITHOUT PUNCTUATION. "Lord God have mercy on my father he wasn't much of a Jew but then again he didn't have much chance what with my mother and her goyish friends but he did the best he could"—and so on and so on.

Lori and I dipped washcloths into the yellow bucket and gently patted my father's body. His skin was delicate; the washing was more symbolic than cleansing.

"First the face, then the right hand, right arm, then the left hand and arm, then chest and downward." We worked as I talked. I rolled my father toward me again so Lori could wash part of his back, then she rolled him the other way, cradling his head and shoulders, and I washed the rest of his back. We dropped our washcloths onto the floor and kicked them under the table.

I filled my two mop buckets with water from the giant sink. "This is the important part," I told Lori. "This is the *tahara* itself. I'll stand on his right side, you on his left. I will start pouring the water at shoulder level, and when I tell you to start, you do the same. Pour the water continuously as you walk toward his feet. Don't stop. Whatever water is left gets poured over the feet."

I lifted my bucket, straining, and carried it to his right shoulder. Tilting the bucket, I poured carefully, wrapping my father in a translucent sheet of water. I walked slowly; when I got to his waist, I said, "Okay, start." I watched Lori out of the corner of my eye, gauging her progress. She was pouring sparingly with enormous concentration and ended up with lots of water, which she poured, as directed, over his feet.

I looked at Bob and almost laughed aloud at his dismay over the condition of his workroom.

"OK, now we dry him. Pat, don't rub." This involved many more towels and sheets, checks for blood—which is sacred and not to be lost during *tahara*—and rolling. We slid wet sheets out and kicked them under the table. Now Dad was clean and dry, lying on a dry sheet on his back.

I TOOK A DEEP BREATH. I realized I'd been emotionally iced up for almost three-quarters of an hour. That was the good news. The bad news was that I was starting to melt. The fact of my father's death, that I was here with him now for the last time, was starting to sink in.

I needed to finish quickly. I ripped open the brown paper wrapping of the shroud. The burial garments, called *tachrichim*, were made of coarse white linen, plain and unhemmed. I'd never seen a man's shroud before, and was concerned there might be something unfamiliar here. I found leggings, undertunic and over-tunic, ankle and waist straps, *kippah*, sheet, and packet of earth from Israel. There was no equivalent to the woman's "apron," a small square of linen tied around the waistband. Gee, surprise.

We pulled on the leggings and maneuvered him into a sitting position so we could slip the two tunics over his head. I showed Lori the ceremonial knots used to tie the ankle straps and waist strap. Rolling him first to one side and then the other, we tucked the linen sheet under him, put the *kippah* on his head, and sprinkled the earth over his eyes, heart and genitals. Finally,

we wrapped the linen sheet around him. Normally, in a *tahara*, we'd then put him in his coffin, but the funeral wasn't until the next day, so he'd go back into the refrigerator until then.

IT WAS DONE. My father was ready for burial, as a Jew. He was going to a Mormon cemetery, but he was going as a Jew.

The final act of a *tahara* is to ask the dead person's forgiveness for poor handling, misspoken prayers, whatever. "Dad, we're sorry for anything that wasn't quite right," I began in a whisper. Lori turned her head and started to sob, quietly.

"We did our best for you, Lori and I, and we hope you'll forgive us for anything we did wrong. Rest in peace." I choked on the last sentence. There was a moment of silence. No one spoke. Then I lifted my head and said, "We're done. Let's go."

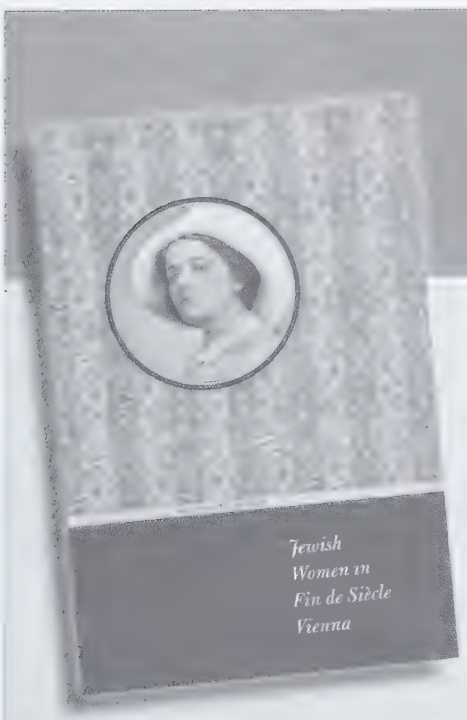
BOB ESCORTED US TO THE FRONT DOOR, TALKING ABOUT HOW INTERESTING THIS HAD BEEN. We walked out into the August inferno. Lori helped me put the buckets into my Rav, hugged me and climbed into her minivan. As I backed out, I saw her hunched over her steering wheel, crying.

My Rav slid into four o'clock traffic, and I started home. Without warning, the last of the ice melted, and I began to sob, painfully. I pulled into a strip mall parking lot, and wrapped my arms around myself. Tears poured down my cheeks.

Why did my mother and I let our religious differences keep us away from each other? Why did I let my father's coldness go unchallenged and unexplained? Was it cowardice? Pride? Stubbornness? Mine? Theirs? Had the difference in our gods really been so important? It wasn't what church you went to, not which cemetery in the desert you were buried in, not whether ham or corned beef was served on tables afterward. None of that mattered. None of it ever should have mattered.

I gathered myself together in the driver's seat, blew my nose, and wiped my glasses with my shirt. I took a deep breath and steered the Rav towards the street. My mother and my father were dead. All the things that kept us apart, all the things that prevented us from loving each other, seemed insignificant and petty. The light turned green, and the street opened up before me. ■

Amy Wall lives in Tucson, AZ. She's been a chemist for a manufacturing facility, a design engineer at a circuit breaker factory, a project manager at a defense plant and a remodeler of old homes. She is back in school working towards a degree in Transpersonal Psychology.



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Lake Michigan *Tashlikh*

On Not Putting Down a Ritual until It Does Its Work

by BARBARA STOCK

THIS PAST YEAR WAS AN EMOTIONALLY CHALLENGING ONE FOR ME. On Rosh Hashana I drove alone to Lake Michigan, as I usually do, to perform *tashlikh*—the act of tossing bread into a body of moving water to symbolically cast off one's sins. But I left the lake feeling that I needed to return, so I went again the next day. Oddly, something was still missing for me; I hadn't actually thrown out what I needed to. On the day before Yom Kippur, I found myself at the lake again. Whoever heard of doing tashlikh three times when our tradition enjoins us to do it once? What was going on with me?

It is not really "sins" that I attempt to throw away during tashlikh—that word doesn't fit my failures. What I try to throw away are my struggles as a human being. I get selfishly involved in my own life and forget to call friends. I'm stubborn and won't admit when I'm wrong. I hold grudges. I don't let go of wounds and disappointments. I set unrealistic expectations which lead me to feel let down by those I love. I don't forgive myself, and I certainly don't forgive others. I allow anger and guilt to eat away at me. The word "sins" isn't helpful to me at all. What I'm throwing into Lake Michigan are my shortcomings, my shame, the places where I'm relationally stuck. Even thinking this way helps me feel lighter.

Though I could do tashlikh with my congregation or my family, I always choose to do it alone. I'm an introvert. I want the quiet and peace, the opportunity to form meditative space. Although I usually do my "serious thinking" walking or standing on the beach and only afterwards throw in my chunks of bread, this year I just start throwing pieces of bread in the air, distracted by how many birds swoop down or trot over to get them. Most of the birds are small and friendly, already busy walking up and down the beach.

I watch a Mama Bird squawk and chase her little ones into the water. She's bossy; wherever I toss my crumbs, she gets to them first. I try to throw bread wherever she isn't; I enjoy saving the underdog—or underbird.

Inevitably, I start thinking about my own mother. I believe that I do successfully honor her and care

for her, but I frequently find myself hurt by her and angered. Though I am 64 years old, I still struggle to protect myself—the underbird—when I'm in my mother's presence. The Mama Bird on the beach just wants to grab snippets of bread; my own Mama wants to grab my whole self.

After awhile, an Asian couple and their elderly mother walk down the beach, and I find myself thinking that I like the way the mother is walking: close, but separate, allowing the couple to be a couple—so different from the way my mother clings to me. I offer them bread to feed the birds and they're delighted. The husband holds a camera, motions for me to pose with his wife and the birds, counts 1-2-3. The wife says, "Thank you, thank you," effusively, perhaps the only English phrase she knows.

My goodness. I have just spent a full hour thinking about my mother, tossing and tossing little chunks of bread. She's 94. It's way past time for me to let go of my "stuckness," the pain I've carried way too long. She is who she is. With others, she's friendly and smart, well-informed, outgoing, meeting the challenges of living with strangers in a retirement home. With me, she's different: always demanding and judgmental, displeased with me, mad. She wanted me to be different than I was: to be popular, not a bookworm. To be thin and beautiful, not who I was: plump and near-sighted, thoughtful, studious, verbal, bright, driven to achieve. Even when I tried to be what she wanted, I disappointed her. In truth, she didn't like me.

I pull off little pieces of bread and toss them, pull and toss, pull and toss. I need to let go of this pain. She wanted a different daughter; I wanted a different Mama Bird.

What will happen, I ask myself, if I finally let go of the pain of feeling unloved and accept her as she is? I am surprised by the words that jump to mind: "The cord will crumble. The cord between us. And she will die." What an odd thought! Has my connection to her—my cord of anger—kept her alive? I have to face it: *She will die as she is*. Can I give up the anger? Toss it in the lake?

I crumble the anger and toss, crumble and toss. I am probably not crumbling the anger itself, but I realize that I *could*. I do feel lighter.

My hands are empty. I have crumbled a complete loaf of bread.

THE NEXT DAY, I FIND MYSELF RETURNING TO THE LAKE. I've never done this before—felt driven to perform tashlikh twice. As I approach the beach, it seems like every seagull from the entire Lake Michigan shoreline is swarming around me. Mama Bird must have spread the word: *really good bread here.* But the birds fly so close to my head that they frighten me. Several swoop down and peck at my hair. This has never happened before. I drop the loaf and rush back to the car—without bread, but still with my shortcomings.

Perhaps it's a sign: I'm not ready. I should come back when I'm ready.

A WEEK PASSES. IT IS THE DAY BEFORE YOM KIPPUR. Early in the morning, I head to the lake. Instead of walking directly to the beach—as I did the previous two times—I stop and find myself sitting on a bench. I'm alone, totally alone. I let the thoughts and feelings I've considered for days well up. To my surprise, with my hand on my heart, I begin sobbing—sobbing about my relationship with each of my children, my husband, my friends, my inability to take away their hurts, to make life better for each of them. I was trained to take care of my mother, and despite years of therapy, I still feel the need to caretake everyone I love. I have to stop myself, remind myself to keep boundaries. It's hard, so hard. Their lives are theirs, not mine. *Theirs, not mine,* I tell myself. My love can't erase their pain.

I'm sobbing because of the challenging hands life has dealt us: a mother critically ill my entire life; a horrific divorce that continues to reverberate in the lives of my children; much of my family wired for clinical anxiety and depression; a step-daughter with multiple sclerosis and Crohn's disease; a new granddaughter born with a cleft lip and palette and three surgeries in this, her first year of life.

I drop my loaf and rush back—without bread, but with all my shortcomings. Perhaps it's a sign.

I'm sobbing with the pain of my friends' lives, one struggling to speak after a stroke—his wife exhausted from the stress—another younger than I bravely facing death. I'm sobbing because no one can take away my pain. I'm sobbing because sometimes pain just hurts.

In the past, I cast away hateful, vengeful feelings. But the deep feelings that now bring tears are not retaliative ones. They are ones that want to counter helplessness. *How little control I have!* I feel this with a piercing newness. I'm sobbing until I stand up and walk to the beach and begin crumbling my sweet Sabbath challah, crumbling and tossing, tossing and crumbling. I throw away my insane expectations, for myself and for others. I toss to give those I love back their lives, to take back my own life to tend.

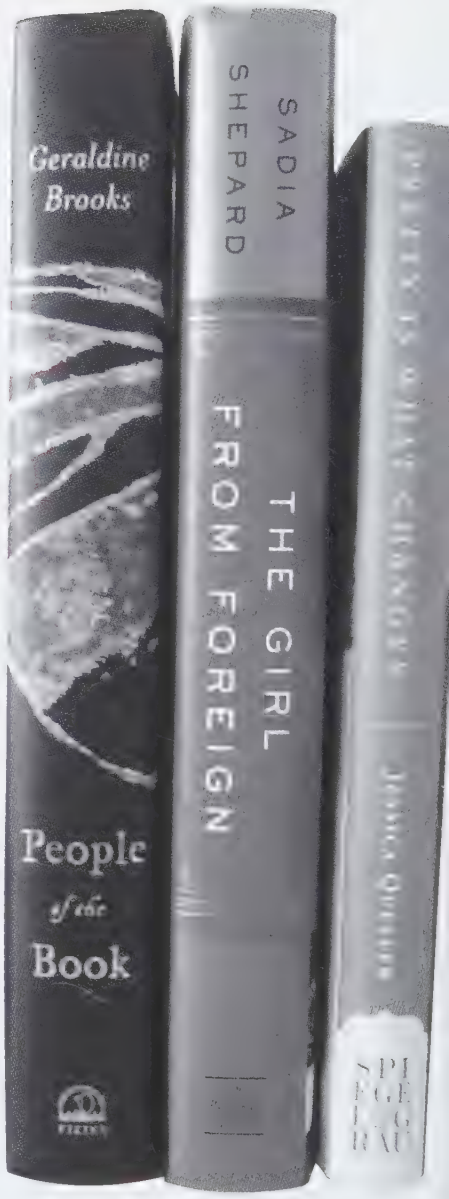
I wait for the birds, but not a single one comes. Fact is stranger than fiction. I expect flocks of birds, convocations, congregations of them. Not one bird appears. Not one. I can't even control whether or not birds come to eat my challah! I pitch streams of bread, letting go my pain, my pain and my shortcomings. Never have I been to Lake Michigan for tashlikh and not drawn a single bird. Not one bird in the four-state area wants to taste what I let go.

That's all right.

I do feel lighter. I crumble and toss, crumble and toss…until I no longer crumble. ■

Barbara Stock is a clinical psychologist in private practice in Evanston, IL.

REVIEWS



The Grand Master

Four novellas, literary and lofty

The new short story collection from **Cynthia Ozick**, ***Dictation: A Quartet*** (Houghton Mifflin, $24.00), is a cerebral look at lives in the thrall of devotion to God, art and self.

The four long stories here exemplify her well-honed writerly strengths—lean and lucid prose, astute observational distance, intellectual rigor and emotional curiosity—in the service of illuminating the lives of artists and intellectuals, characters to whom revelation does not come easy, if it comes at all.

In "Actors," Matt Sorley (né Mose Sadacca) clings to shifty notions of personal artistic integrity at the cost of his ambition. His dour, crossword-puzzle-writing wife, Frances, nags him to go on pointless, ignoble auditions. With some ambivalence he accepts the role of a modern-day King Lear, which may or may not resurrect his career and creative dignity.

In "At Fumicaro," we meet Frank Castle, who "knew everything." Who "reread *The Heart of the Matter* a hundred times, weeping…for poor Scobie." At an Italian villa for a conference on the Catholic Church, the lofty intellectual finds himself inexplicably drawn to a pregnant teenaged chambermaid, suddenly ripe for religious and cultural illumination of the decidedly non-cognitive sort.

"What Happened to the Baby?" gives us college-aged Phyllis and her aged, charlatan Uncle Simon, whose Depression-era attempts to create a universal language were perhaps not as noble as had been assumed.

And in the immensely satisfying title story, Ozick—herself once a typist—imagines a chance meeting and lopsided friendship between the secretaries of Henry James and Joseph Conrad. James's secretary is hot-blooded and intense, while Conrad's is somewhat removed and proper, each in direct contrast to her famous employer's literary sensibility. And though those seemingly opposing personalities are the subject of some debate between the amanuenses, they agree that, as "conduits," they are integral to the development of their respective literary giants. Certainly typing is not the extent of their contribution to the literature they help bring into the world. Ozick toys brilliantly with notions of procreation, artistic and otherwise: these secretaries are "the artist's true vessel, the sole brain to receive the force of creation in its first flooding…" But still they wonder: Will posterity have a place for them?

James (who was, not incidentally, the subject of Ozick's graduate thesis) is a real presence throughout *Dictation*; his legacy looms large within Ozick's narrative voice. Unsurprisingly, many criticisms often leveled against James—authorial remove, emotional chill—can likewise be directed at Ozick. She seems to write less from the heart than from the head. She is lofty, cogent and in control, like the writers and artists of great seriousness she honors here. Ozick is a deeply knowledgeable, trustworthy and cerebral writer, but if you like your fiction hot-blooded and untidy, passionate and unrepentant, you'll likely identify with Conrad's imagined secretary, who, lashing out, notes that "Mr. James's tales simply evade…they leave behind no more than a phosphorescent trail…"

ELISA ALBERT

Meteorology & Sanity

Where characters and readers alike can't trust the author.

"Last December a woman entered my apartment who looked exactly like my wife." So begins **Rivka Galchen**'s strange and enthralling first novel, ***Atmospheric Disturbances*** (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $24), a whirlwind musing on doppelgangers, sanity and meteorological currents. With deadpan wit and surrealist narration, Galchen's narrator, the psychiatrist Leo Liebenstein, takes the reader on a ride through New York, Buenos Aires and Patagonia, in search of his lost wife and of the nature of reality itself.

A blend of Pynchon, Murakami and Nicole Krauss, the novel's plot is nearly undiagrammable. Suffice it to say that it involves an unreliable narrator convinced that his wife has been replaced with an exact duplicate, a secret society of weather forecasters that control the world's forces and many cups of coffee served by waitresses with dyed-blonde hair. Leo chases his perhaps-lost wife Rema and his psychiatric patient Harvey to Rema's ances-

tral home of Buenos Aires, there meeting her estranged mother and investigating the complicated interconnections with the esteemed meteorologist Tzvi Gal-Chen (name not coincidental). If this sounds like too many details to follow, never fear: Galchen's short chapters and dry delivery keep the plot moving, a twisty road where you can see just far enough ahead to appreciate the destination to which you're being delivered.

At the heart of this novel lie deep musings about identity and reality: how do we trust what we think we see? Leo wakes one day to see a woman who looks almost exactly like his wife, but not quite: she bears an uncharacteristic love for dogs, she smells slightly different. And from this introduction going forward, Leo's own mental health is suspect to the reader. Identities shift and blur: Rema's impersonation of Tzvi Gal-Chen bespeaks a greater confusion as to Gal-Chen's identity—and his association with the author herself; the 49 Quantum Fathers of meteorology may run the world or merely control Harvey's psychosis. Beneath these general confusions sit deeper historical themes: the "disappeared" in Argentina and the specter of European and South American refugees making their way in the United States.

By constantly keeping the reader on the defensive, unsure of the narrative's truth, Galchen induces the same sort of paranoia that Leo diagnoses in his patients and sees in himself. What keeps the narrative centered is the specificity of detail, the absurd descriptions of a small hole in a pocket, a pistachio-stained finger. *Atmospheric Disturbances* marks a masterful debut, a sardonic rollicking ride that returns you home, unsure as to whether you're the same as before the storm hit.

SARA N.S. MEIROWITZ

Juifemme?

Transcending Parochialism

Daughters of Sarah: Anthology of Jewish Women Writing in French (Holmes and Meier, $20) broadens the scope of mainstream French literary studies. The editors, **Eva Martin Sartori** and **Madeleine Cottenet-Hage**, delve into an eclectic collection of material, some of which they translate into English for the first time. Excerpts from essays, letters, plays, novels, poetry, autobiographies and philosophical works from the nineteenth century to the present include such familiar names as Hélène Cixous and Irène Nemirovsky.

Preceded by a concise and useful introduction on the history of Jews (and Jewish women) in France, this volume examines the preoccupation with Emancipation (the granting of full citizenship rights to Jews in the eighteenth century), which is tightly and often uneasily connected to assimilation; the specific contours of French anti-Semitism; the profound impact of the Holocaust for thousands of Jews deported under the Vichy government; and the burden of French colonialism in Algeria, to give just a few examples.

The editors describe a French Jewish literature by women "more intimate, more visceral" than writings by men. These texts are unified by common themes—sexuality, family dynamics, the right of a woman to choose her husband, her place in the community, self-hate and anti-Semitism—that illuminate French women's desire to master their identity in different, even contradictory ways. While Julienne Bloch (1833–1868) urges Jewish women to play a central role in Jewish life, Simone Weil (1909–1943), who eventually converted to Catholicism, strives to prove to the French government during World War II how meaningless the word "Jewish" is to her.

Writings on the Holocaust include Liliane Atlan's poignant play based on the story of a school principal in the Warsaw ghetto who voluntarily accompanied a group of Jewish children to the gas chamber while telling them stories; Anna Langfus's nihilistic musing on the solipsistic nature of grief, when she returned from concentration camps; Sarah Kofman's complex meditation on identity as she reflects on the Christian "mother" who raised her during the war. To these authors, art is an urgent, transformative experience, a last resort against death.

Also powerful is writing that transcends parochialism, what one author, Régine Robin, calls "folklorization." Hélène Cixous, the feminist essayist and playwright, both reclaims and subverts her Jewishness and femaleness. In revisiting her life in Algeria in the early forties, she is the outcast, the other, the *Juifemme* (or Jew-woman), as she puts it eloquently, whose father has lost the right to practice as a doctor during the Vichy period. Yet at the same time, when confronted by a Muslim shoeshine boy about to clean her shoes, she becomes aware of her power as a woman and an accomplice to the French colonization.

Other writers are no less satisfying: Irène Némirovsky delves masterfully into the psychology of a self-hating Jew from the French bourgeoisie. Michèle Sarde's dexterous play with the ironies of destiny is reminiscent of Greek tragedies—a young woman finds out she is a Jew who was raised by Christians during the war, while her lover is the son of a Nazi collaborator. Annie Cohen, a Sephardic Jew from North Africa, weaves her preoccupation with origins and roots into her poetry. While eliciting the lost world of her Egyptian origins and reveling in polyglossalia (Judeo-Spanish, Arabic and French), Paula Jacques goes beyond quaintness to invent a jubilant language. While some choices here are more felicitous than others, none have lost their freshness or their appeal for a contemporary audience.

YAËLLE AZAGURY

Leo wakes one day to see a woman who looks almost exactly like his wife, but not quite: she smells slightly different.

From Gossip Girl to the Real World

Consider the prophylactic mastectomy

"To cut off my breasts, or not to cut off my breasts." This is the existential question facing 34-year-old television writer **Jessica Queller**, who has tested positive for a genetic mutation that gives her up to an 85% chance of getting breast cancer and puts her at high risk for ovarian cancer.

In her memoir ***Pretty Is What Changes: Impossible Choices, the Breast Cancer Gene, and How I Defied My Odds*** (Spiegel & Grau, $24.95), Queller, who works on the popular high-school drama "Gossip Girl," discusses the agonizing decisions she must make, given the likelihood that she'll develop cancer. She could opt for frequent screenings, with the hope that her doctor would find a malignancy in its early stages or choose a prophylactic double mastectomy; if she chooses the surgery, it would be followed by breast reconstruction—the menu options for which the author writes is "as long and nuanced as Starbucks'."

And then there is the matter of her ovaries. A mastectomy would significantly decrease Queller's risk of breast cancer, but only the removal of her ovaries will lower her chances of getting ovarian cancer—the disease that killed her mother, but not before turning this energetic, middle-age woman into an invalid.

These possibilities weigh especially heavily on Queller, who is single and longs for marriage and children. "If I had a mastectomy and reconstruction, would men no longer find me desirable?" she wonders. "Would I feel deformed? Would I ever want to be touched again? Would I no longer feel like a whole woman?"

Despite the gravity of the choices she's confronting, "Pretty Is What Changes"—taken from a line in the Sondheim musical "Sunday in the Park with George"—is not a maudlin tale. Queller lightens her memoir with anecdotes about her friends, her high-powered colleagues on the Warner Brothers lot, her adventures in dating and her fashion choices.

The story unfolds organically—that is, until the end, when the narrative flow is interrupted by a summary of the questions and ethical dilemmas posed by genetic testing. Here, Queller cites statistics, quotes newspaper articles, and skims over topics such as the engineering of embryos and the circumstances in which would-be parents choose to abort a pregnancy. This reporting could have been expanded and woven more seamlessly into the course of the narrative. Still, Queller, who has penned scripts for "Felicity" and "The Gilmore Girls," proves with this book a knack for storytelling that transcends the teen-drama genre.

GABRIELLE BIRKNER

The Joy of [Orthodox] Sex

Between desire and abstinence...

The proceedings of a volatile 2005 conference on sex, sexuality and Modern Orthodoxy are collected in ***Gender Relationships in Marriage and Out***, edited by **Rivkah Blau** (Yeshiva University Press). Jennie Rosenfeld explains the impetus for the volume in her introduction: "The conflict between living as an Orthodox Jew and simultaneously living in the modern world is acute in the areas of sexuality and relationships... Individuals at all stages of life are struggling."

Certainly there are problems out there in Jewish coupling: young singles pining to find their *bashert*—the mate they were meant for. People struggling with sexual inclinations that don't match traditional prescriptions. Married couples whose wish to live according to Jewish law is confounded by its demands for prolonged periods of sexual abstinence. Others face "halakhic infertility" (caused when a woman's fertile period coincides with her post-menstrual days of "ritual impurity").

The most broad-ranging treatment here comes from Israeli "Internet rabbi" Yuval Cherlow, drawing upon some 80,000 questions put to "Ask the Rabbi" forums. On issues like premarital sex, masturbation, homosexuality and infidelity of both the "virtual" (online) and the actual kind, his approach is rigorously halakhic; nevertheless, the public nature of the forum forces him to confront these as realities. For example, he relates that when a prominent yeshiva head reproached him over his involvement with people of "alternative sexual orientation," Cherlow pointed out to him (after first obtaining their permission) four young men in his own yeshiva who had approached him via the Internet in this regard. The *rosh yeshiva* was shocked, and, as Cherlow says, "his criticism changed to support and encouragement."

On the other hand, Cherlow stands by the preconception that the family structure of "a father, a mother and children" was "extremely stable" throughout Jewish history. Was he listening when historian Shaul Stampfer declared that "traditional Jewish society in Eastern Europe was characterized by a high level of divorce"?

Three essays deal with the proliferation of young Orthodox singles in American cities. Sociologist Sylvia Barack Fishman is adamant that neither feminist attitudes nor high educational levels are responsible for late marriage; she points, rather, to ever-more-exacting criteria

Confronting the realities of premarital sex, masturbation, homosexuality, and infidelity both "virtual" (online) and actual.

imposed upon the marital "merchandise" by members of both sexes—such as body builds defined by the "media-created construction of beauty," or "perfect" levels of religious observance. This extended singleness raises unprecedented tensions: if, starved for human touch, individuals violate their own standards of forbidden physical contact, can they carry on religiously as though nothing has happened? Meanwhile, community leaders ask: Does mainstreaming singles risk legitimizing a way of life alien to Jewish mores?

The realities of Jewish married life are addressed sensitively by several essays discussing education for "family purity" observance. Does the period of enforced abstinence following the menstrual period really make a wife "as dear to [her husband] as on their wedding day"? Not always, admits Deena R. Zimmerman. However, halakhic arguments in favor notwithstanding, shortening the period of abstinence will have to wait, according to Zimmerman, for "the rebuilding of the Temple." Though trained as a female halakhic advisor (a new institution on the Orthodox scene), she urges those in need of leniencies to pop their stained underwear into the mailbox of a male *posek* (rabbinic decisor). Was she there for Stampfer's remark that "questions of *taharat hamishpahah* were [traditionally] in the purview of women"?

The book concludes with an excellent presentation of a comprehensive sample curriculum on "Life Values and Intimacy Education" for yeshiva day schools, by Yocheved Debow and Anna C. Woloski-Wruble. In the crucial area of sexual values and ethics, why aren't these compelling ideas addressed not only to the Modern Orthodox, but to Jews everywhere?

DEBORAH GRENIMAN

Mommy and Me

A very different kind of motherhood novel

Meg Wolitzer's *The Ten Year Nap* (Riverhead Books, $24.95), though presented as a novel, is more of an ensemble piece, where the voice of each of her female characters works best in juxtaposition with the others. It's less plot than plotting: these are the stories of women who've each chosen, one way or another, to make their families their careers.

The characters in this book are book-smart, if not whip-smart. Take Amy Buckner, who has left her career in law to be home with her child; now that he's 10, she feels deep ambivalence about returning to work. She lives vicariously (as women inevitably tend to do in women-themed books, oddly enough) through the clandestine affair her new friend Penny Ramsey is having with a gorgeous young Englishman. Amy's old best friend, Jill Hamlin, has moved out to the suburbs with her adopted daughter, and finds herself painfully isolated and lonely. Another mother from Amy's son's school, Roberta Sokolov, is a liberal-minded activist who works as a volunteer with a grassroots organization to help young women in South Dakota get abortions—yet she still finds that her life lacks definition.

The women travel through age-appropriate circles of ideas and conversation, from the crushing economic vise of family life in Manhattan to the permutations of sexuality within the context of marriage. Amy can't figure out why her husband seems to be more attached to his BlackBerry than his libido, and discovers that in order to make economic ends meet in Manhattan, he has been labeling the couple's expenses as work expenses to be reimbursed.

Yet two features set this book apart from the standard pink-cover genre of "chick lit." First, a kind of chronological kaleidoscope lends the modern tribulations a welcome grounding and gravitas; Wolitzer intersperses chapters about the women of the early 21st century with stories of their mothers and their pasts, from Amy's Canadian feminist mom to Penny's lover's mother, a secretary for Margaret Thatcher. The second redeeming characteristic of the book is Wolitzer's skill with language, and her ability to convey common situations in a few well-chosen words. When pondering her son's addiction to fantasy novels, Amy muses, "Maybe it was just that the actual world of adulthood, with its long meetings and requirements that you sit still, was too disappointing for most boys to face head-on.... At which point, in order to weather the pain of losing that last fantasy foothold, you discovered the sexual wonders of girls, with their outsized breasts, nimble tongues, and the geometrical welcome of their open legs. You replaced one type of fantasy with another, and then you never, ever had to lose that one."

The idea behind the title—that women who opt out of the workforce to be at home with their children are, in effect, taking a nap—may at first seem depressing. But for its natural readership of intelligent women who have made this choice, women who spend most of their time alternating a monosyllabic, child-friendly vocabulary with a polysyllabic echo chamber of self-examination, this book will resonate. Under the piles of to-be-folded clothing and behind the wheels of the SUVs picking up four-year olds, there are unspoken words, frustrations, bittersweet regrets and, occasionally, brilliance.

JORDANA HORN

The Rain in Babylon

An unexpected interrogation of the Talmud

Massekhet Ta'anit (Mohr Siebeck, €89.00), is the inaugural volume in a new series of scholarly feminist analyses of each of the tractates of the Babylonian Talmud. Ta'anit, the tractate that is the subject of this volume by **Tal Ilan**, deals with ritual fasting, usually in a case when rain fails to fall.

Ta'anit, which literally means "fast," seems at first to be a surprising choice for feminist analysis; why not begin with any of the various tractates that deal directly with women's issues, such as *Ketubot* (marriage contracts) or *Niddah* (menstrual impurity)? Yet as Ilan compellingly demonstrates, the central metaphor that runs through this tractate is highly gendered: the rabbis use the term "copulation" [*r'via*] to describe rainfall. Rain is overtly compared to a male (Ilan aptly translates the Talmudic phrase as

"virile rain") and the land, of course, is always female. Moreover, the rabbis of the Talmud explicitly compare the land under rainfall to a woman in the act of sexual intercourse, which reflects another common Talmud metaphor in which a woman is the fertile field in which a man deposits his seed.

Ilan's examination of this metaphor as it plays itself out throughout the tractate is a central subject of this volume, but not its only subject. She also considers all those passages in Ta'anit that deal with women and gender. Her analysis extends to such issues as: Did men and women dance together in Talmudic times? Did the women of the Talmud wear make-up? And, following the twisted thread of Talmudic discursiveness, she touches also upon issues as far afield as: Did anyone have sex in Noah's ark? How to account for the trope of women eating their children that appears in Lamentations as well as in rabbinic literature?

These questions, which arise out of passages in this tractate, are explored through comparative analysis with the Jerusalem Talmud and classical rabbinic midrashic collections. All texts are presented in both Hebrew and English, with parallel texts placed conveniently side-by-side and with all feminist or gender-related passages underlined.

"Feminist investigation is most interested in the history of textual transmission," she explains in her methodological introduction. "It is the working hypothesis of this discipline that editing and copying worked in a specific direction—to belittle, denigrate and silence women." Unfortunately, the print of the text is in a frustratingly small font size. One can only lament that even in our age, which has witnessed a great revolution in feminist Jewish scholarship, women are still making themselves small.

This series of feminist commentaries on the tractates of the Babylonian Talmud is the brainchild of Ilan, an Israeli-born professor who is currently teaching in the department of Jewish Studies at the Freie Universtät in Berlin. The other tractates have been assigned to feminist Jewish scholars the world over, including Judith Hauptman of the Jewish Theological Seminary, Tirzah Meacham of the University of Toronto, and Shulamit Valler of the University of Haifa. The publication of this series, which is sponsored by the Freie Universtät, is the first time since WWII that significant scholarship in the field of Talmud is being spearheaded and funded by a German academic institution. Moreover, although feminist Bible commentaries have been around for decades, this series looks to be the first comprehensive and systematic feminist analysis of the entire Babylonian Talmud.

To invoke the central metaphor of this volume, one can only hope, then, that Tal Ilan's efforts will continue to yield fruit.

ILANA KURSHAN

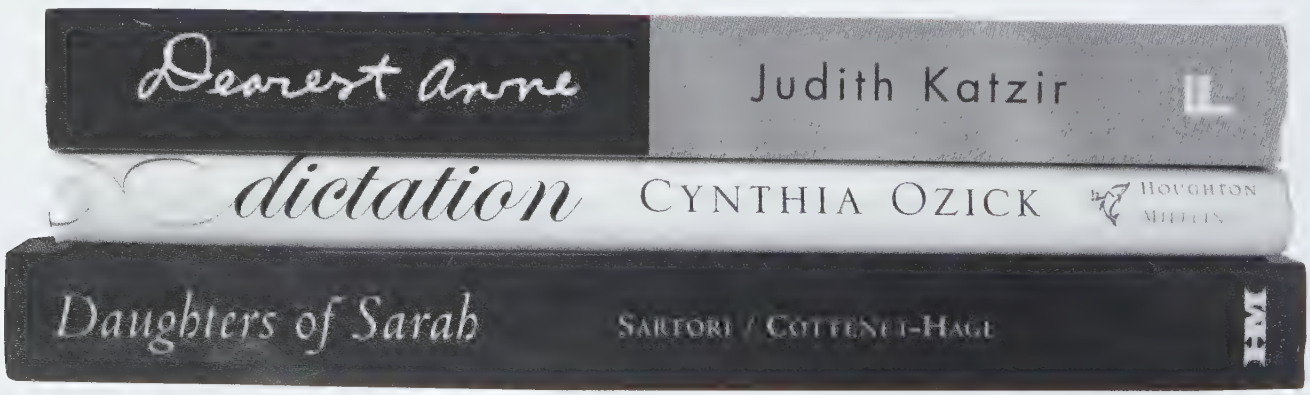
Protestant, Muslim, Jew

One convoluted family of believers

Sadia Shepard, author of the memoir ***Girl From Foreign: A Search for Shipwrecked Ancestors, Lost Loves, and Forgotten Histories*** (The Penguin Press, $25.95), was raised near Boston by a white Protestant American father, a Pakistani Muslim mother, and her maternal grandmother, Nana. She grew up comfortable with her complex identity until, at the age of 13, she discovered that her grandmother had been born and raised Jewish in Bombay's Bene Israel community, the tiny Indian Jewish community that traces its roots back to the Lost Tribes of Israel. Just before Nana's death, Shepard promises her that she will return to her grandmother's homeland. This book is the moving account of how she fulfilled that promise.

Shepard goes to India both because she longs to connect with her grandmother in a deeper way and because she feels that she must understand the Judaism of Nana in order to choose which religion is hers. She becomes involved in the Bene Israel community, teaching in the local Jewish school, going to services and celebrations at the synagogue her grandmother once attended, and tracking down Nana's family in Bombay and her ancestral village on the Konkan coast. Her exploration is not a search for a theological Truth, but a quest to unpack what it means to belong—to family, to community, to country. As she says, "I want to be accepted here more than anything…I want to understand the story of the Bene Israel and find a way to tell it. I want the grocer and the vegetable man…to recognize me when I approach. I want to make myself understood in Hindi. I want to fit in, to live here and feel at home."

Shepard's narrative intertwines her relationship with her grandmother and the rest of her family in Boston, her



grandmother's past, and her own sojourn in India. Her engrossing storytelling pulls the reader deeply into the heat, color and chaos of India, and enmeshes us in the family's intimate personal relationships. This is a memoir with novelistic qualities, in particular a hint of magical realism, as Shepard recounts Nana's prophetic dreams of family deaths, and her own dreams, premonitions and feelings of déjà vu.

As evocative as her narrative is, Shepard's ear for dialogue is awkward, and she often stumbles when she becomes analytical or philosophical. The falsest note in the book is the inclusion of a young Indian man, Rekhev, who becomes Shepard's guide and confidant. His long-winded and not very insightful opinions and musings leave us wondering why the delightful Shepard is attracted to his company.

However, *The Girl From Foreign* is much greater than the sum of its parts. This book will appeal to anyone curious about the Bene Israel Jews of India or who has struggled with her or his own identity. Moreover, it will resonate with readers who regret not asking their own grandparents more about their past. Shepard's search reads as a beautiful paean to her grandmother, who, toward the end of her life, indicated that perhaps she regretted her choice to leave the religion of her parents for the religion of her husband. Shepard's search, therefore, is a posthumous and vicarious effort to return to the branch point at which Nana made that choice.

ELIZABETH MANDEL

Subversive Teenage Diarist

Scandal in a Haifa high school

Judith Katzir's ***Dearest Anne: A Tale of Impossible Love***, translated by Dalya Bilu (Feminist Press, $15.99) is not your average teen romance, nor is it an average tale of a writer coming of age. Katzir's work very nearly succeeds in transcending the conventional strictures of these genres. While boldly reinvigorating a standard journal-entry format, Katzir exposes Jewish taboos against the backdrop of a changing Israeli society in the late 1970s—all in the pursuit of revealing a tale of pure but illicit passion. That the resulting story is compulsively readable is a testament to how Katzir articulates, with uncanny precision, the thoughts and feelings racing through the mind of her teenage protagonist.

The novel opens in 2001 as Rivi Shenhar, a writer living in Tel Aviv, is leaving the funeral of her lover in her childhood hometown of Haifa (where Katzir herself was born in 1963). The funeral enables Rivi to unearth some long-buried childhood memories. Liberated by the body's placement in the ground, she takes on the opposite task: returning "to the place where the fire flower was born and where it was buried alive," then literally digging up a pack of notebooks that contain the secrets of her past with the deceased. Subsequently, we read Rivi reading herself, as she is swept into each journal one by one and relives the most turbulent and formative episodes of her life. This framework enables Katzir to bounce back and forth between the mature Rivi and her adolescent self, a gangly, bespectacled eighth-grader who is deaf in one ear and prone to arrhythmia—hardly a candidate for the torrid love affair that is in fact the main subject of her diary.

Complicating and enriching this gripping story is the Holocaust's pervasive impact on the Israeli psyche. At age thirteen and a half, Rivi has already read *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* (a bat mitzvah gift) several times over. In her first diary entry, Rivi writes to Anne and expresses her desire "to be your Kitty, the one for whose eyes and heart you wrote your diary." Anne Frank thus becomes both literary muse and recipient of Rivi's confessional tale of attraction to—and eventual affair with—Michaela Berg, her charismatic literature and composition teacher. Beyond Anne Frank's function as Rivi's addressee and tacit co-conspirator, Katzir also includes descriptions of Holocaust Memorial Day ceremonies at school in order to underline the educational and ideological functioning of the catastrophe in Israeli society. Rivi even formulates the small tragedies of her family life in metaphorical Shoah terms; when her parents divorce and her father's parents stop visiting her, she comments that "I've lost half my family, like the people who came from the Holocaust…"

The entanglement of the Holocaust motif with an erotic story of lesbian love containing pedophilic overtones will certainly strike some readers as sensationalistic, if not subversive. Yet Katzir challenges readers to act as Rivi does, to remove Anne Frank from her pedestal and reinscribe her as a real and very human young woman within our own narratives. Hannah Ovnat-Tamir points out in her enlightening afterword that *Dearest Anne* uses Rivi's artistic development to map an alternative legacy of female literary influence, starting with Anne and radiating outwards to include Virginia Woolf and such Hebrew writers as Zelda, Leah Goldberg, Dalia Ravikovitch and Amalia Kahana-Carmon. Part of Michaela's tutelage is to open her student's eyes to the beauty of words penned by women, and notably, Rivi's own poems eventually appear in the text.

Towards the novel's end, even now that she is a writer and the mother of two daughters, Rivi conveys her puzzlement over the true significance of her relationship with Michaela, a union that was, of course, eventually discovered. She still longs "to descend through all the layers of time, to reach rock bottom…" *Dearest Anne* nimbly represents the process of personal excavation, presenting in sharp relief the lasting effects of a love affair both wrenching and wonderful.

HANNAH PRESSMAN

Reimagining History

Three poets who do it well

What draws us to poetry? One answer may be poetry's ability to help us make sense of the relationship between identity and history, a theme central to ***Today: 101 Ghazals*** (Sheep Meadow Press, $13.95) by **Suzanne Gardinier**. The ghazal is an Arabic poetic form on which Gardinier's

poems are loosely based, an unusual boundary-crossing choice for a Jewish poet. Gardinier uses the single poetic form to bring concepts together across geography, religion, and even gender, as in ghazal #29, where Jewish prayer (davening) and Muslim prayer (salat) are mingled together. Connections are reinforced by the repetition of images through the entire book, such as the "two women" who appear in many poems, including: in #5 "Two women Not meeting One holding a key," in #6 "Helicopters and two women dancing," and in #47 "In the dark Two women Part ash Part angel." These women appear in different times and different worlds—in one case angels, in another ordinary women dancing. By placing this same image throughout, Gardinier creates her own history, with women at its center.

In her prize-winning collection ***The Royal Baker's Daughter*** (The University of Wisconsin Press, $14.95), **Barbara Goldberg** takes a more narrative approach to exploring identity, telling the story of a Jewish family of Holocaust survivors, then expanding to examine overarching Jewish and female history. In "*Wiedergutmachung*," the speaker watches her mother "Fading, but still holding court / from bed." As she declines, the mother waits for history to right itself, seeking reparations for the death of her own parents. But a paltry sum arrives, leaving the family's loss as her daughter's only inheritance. Another possible inheritance, the Jewish homeland, is also lost, as we learn in the poem "From the Book of Judges": "Now this land / is a promise gone haywire, a daredevil's mishap." While these poems do not provide a resolution to the tragedy of history, Goldberg offers a strong female Jewish voice that continues despite the traumas of the past.

Juggling history and the personal, **Yerra Sugarman** also reveals a speaker who comes to terms with herself—this time by exploring the figure of her mother. Part three of the title poem in ***My Bag of Broken Glass*** (Sheep Meadow Press, $13.95) details the experience of the narrator's mother at 19, seeing "the rabbi's daughter Raizel—her friend—shoved / into the boiling blue. // In what language should my mother say / pushed alive into fire?" Sugarman then compares tragedy with the similarly indescribable experience of love—the speaker's first kiss with another woman. She cannot recall if she whispered "*woman-friend-lover, please watch // the raw shaking shadows?*" The shadows of the mother's experience continue to haunt the daughter, but the beauty of this poem is its ability to combine the pain that the mother experiences with the love the daughter finds. The two extreme emotions are not presented as opposites, but as two elements of the same story.

Sugarman writes that "a woman is diasporic," and clearly the women in these three books find themselves uprooted. However, for each poet, poetry is a way of remaking the home, a place where self and history meet.

AIMEE WALKER

From a Winnipeg Library

A trove of Yiddish stories by women

An old man and woman rediscover a love they were denied in their youth. A daughter nurses her father to the very end. A bitter woman cares, barely, for abandoned bastard children. What makes these scenarios and other plot lines so surprising in ***Arguing with the Storm: Stories by Yiddish Women Writers*** (The Feminist Press, $14.95) is not their foreignness but the emotional depths that resonate so profoundly. Editor **Rhea Tregebov** has culled these stories carefully, and each presents a kind of homespun clarity, a sophistication that comes not from cosmopolitanism but from the ability to accept a flawed but vitally alive world.

What is perhaps most surprising about *Arguing with the Storm* is that it does not include the writings of better-known writers such as Anna Margolin and Katya Molodowsky. Some of the writers in this rather far-flung collection may be more recognizable to those familiar with Yiddish literature, but for the most part, the stories, given to the editor by the Winnipeg Women's Yiddish Reading Circle (whose members also assisted with translation) are not among the most famous of this already obscure canon. Nonetheless, these stories are charming and remarkably compelling. While the subtitle can be misleading—with the author including obviously non-fictional personal memoir under "stories"—the straightforward feeling behind most of these accounts, fictional and otherwise, is of characters grappling with their fates.

Some stories, like Sarah Hamer-Jacklyn's "The Guest," have an overt feminist bent. Here Dvora-Zisel annoys her modern son and daughter-in-law when she coddles their baby—and this aggravation intensifies into a bitter intergenerational feud, until Dvora-Zisel realizes that despite her age, she can live apart from them and support herself. Over her son's protestations, she realizes she is better off in his house only as a guest. Parent-child relationships often take center stage in these tales, and they are always complicated. Paula Frankel-Zaltzman's "A Natural Death" and Chava

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Rosenfarb's "Letters to God" grapple with the lives and difficult deaths of the narrators' fathers, and although one is memoir and one fiction, they both explore the tumultuous and complex connection between fathers and children.

In addition to family, class consciousness is at the forefront of these works, stories and memoirs alike recall sweatshop labor, grinding shtetl poverty, and the sorrows of mothers unable to provide for their children. The narrator of Hamer-Jacklyn's "No More Rabbi!" commits a sin—providing a gentile nursemaid for her starving baby cousin, despite her aunt's fear and horror that it will render him "unkosher"—in an effort to save the child's life. Not all caretakers are able or willing to care for their children, however, and it is in the condemnation of the Jewish community's apathy in Rochel Broches' "Little Abrahams" that lends this book its hard-won moral backbone: these authors were unafraid to shine their lanterns into the dark corners of their own world, and the result is heartrending.

This valuable collection is worth reading for its literary merit alone. But with so much of the vast Yiddish culture already lost to us, these stories are also valuable for their sociological insights into Jewish life of a not-so-distant era.

MELANIE WEISS

The Sarajevo Haggadah

A bibliophilic adventure

Hanna Heath, the heroine of ***People of the Book*** by **Geraldine Brooks** (Viking Press, $25.95), is an Australian conservator who has a strained relationship with her mother and an appreciation, bordering on obsession, for the finer details of historic texts. An expert in ancient Hebrew and Arabic, Hanna is called to Sarajevo, towards the end of the most recent Balkan War in 1996, to preserve and analyze the illuminated 14th century Sarajevo Haggadah, which has just surfaced from years in hiding—protected during the war by a Muslim librarian.

Thus Brooks, a Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist, begins her marvelous novel—part mystery, part historical fiction, part Jewish history tour of Europe. It draws the narrative of European Jewry through the passage of time and the passing of a single text from country to country, family to family, and conflict to conflict. The artifacts Hanna finds tucked into the binding of the Haggadah (a hair, an insect's wing), and the stains on its pages, serve as the basis for chapters that spin ever further back into in the history of the 700-year-old text. The mystery and beauty of the Sarajevo Haggadah itself is no fiction, and parts of Brooks' fantasy are interwoven with the few details we have about the actual origins and path of this book, now on permanent display at the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo.

Brooks—whose previous historical fiction novels were similarly rooted in real events—has an ear for building authentic and distinct voices and characters. Here she moves from Sarajevo 1940—when the Holocaust had come to Yugoslavia and another Muslim librarian saved both Jews and their books—to Vienna in the 19th century as the shadow of anti-Semitism threatens a wealthy bourgeois Jewish community, to Venice at the tail end of the Inquisition, to Spain under the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella, and the end of Spanish Jewry. Each chapter highlights a crisis in the Jewish world (expulsion, book burning, torture, murder) and yet each also illuminates that which buoys these battered communities, a combined commitment to knowledge and a singular focus on survival.

Throughout, the Haggadah becomes a symbol of that perennial Passover intonation: that "in every generation, enemies have risen up against us...but God has saved us from their hands." And yet not without bloodshed. A priest watching the rabbi of the Venice Ghetto moving through the city comments, "He was walking with the stooped, head-down posture he always affected when outside the Geto (sic).... How many small humiliations had it taken to bow him over into that cringing stoop: the abusive pranks of loutish boys, the jeers and spittle of the ignorant. If only the stiff-necked fellow would embrace the truth of Christ..."

Between chapters, the modern sleuth Hanna Heath comes increasingly to life. A series of twists and unexpected jumps in the final chapters are satisfyingly shocking, both to the 30-something hard-boiled Australian conservator herself and to the reader. Brooks has incorporated into this text a series of modern day and ancient feminist heroes, from those who save the Haggadah—and their own people—time and again to those women, Brooks implies, who may have contributed to the Sarajevo Haggadah in the first place. It's exactly the sort of fairy tale we should be sharing with our daughters.

SARAH WILDMAN

Our Reviewers

ELISA ALBERT is the author of *The Book of Dahlia* and *How This Night Is Different*. She is fiction editor of Nextbook and an adjunct assistant professor of writing at Columbia.

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SARAH WILDMAN, a senior correspondent for The American Prospect, is a frequent contributor to the New York Times and The Guardian.

HAPPENING

"Mother Economy"

This film by Tel Aviv artist Maya Zack, born in 1976, is a meditation on Holocaust remembrance and an homage to resourceful women during violent periods of political upheaval. The protagonist might be a dedicated non-Jewish housekeeper who remained in the home long after the family's deportation and continued to perform rituals in their absence. Or, if she is the Jewish mother of the household, she survived because of her calculated efforts to distance herself from traumatic memories. *www.jewishmuseum.org/exhibitions/mayazack*

Israeli films & other Israeli films

Now showing in the U.S., at the 23rd (annual) Israel Film Festival: "Gole Sangam/The Stone Flower," (dir. Sarit Haymian) traces the lives of two elderly Jewish women who married as young teens and came to Israel from Iran 50 years ago. "Full of Life" (dir.Tamar Ben Baruch) is a short doc about 12-year-old Roni, sent by her mother to a weight-loss camp. The festival premiered in L.A. and runs in New York October 29-November 13; in Miami, December 10-18. More films and info at *israelfilmfestival.com* The Other Israel Film Festival showcases productions by or about Israeli Arabs. "Lady Kul El Arab," written and directed by Ibtisam Mara'ana, follows Angelina, the first Druze woman to break into the Israeli fashion world. "Desert Brides" (dir. Ada Ushpiz), focuses on a Negev Bedouin wedding photographer who reveals, through her camera lens, the distressing phenomenon of polygamy. Both films are part of the second year of this unusual film fest, taking place Nov 6-13 mostly at the JCC of Manhattan, *otherisraelfilmfestival.org*

"Collaterally Damaged"

In an autobiographical play, author and performer Laura Zam travels to Eastern Europe, tracing her mother's real-life journey during the Holocaust. Her aim is a play that will end genocide, war, or even random acts of rudeness. "It's a comedy," states the playwright, who remembers hearing as a teenager, 'What do you mean you can't clean your room? When I was your age I was sewing buttons on Nazi uniforms!'" Zam, 44, has worked in the Czech Republic and Bosnia and Herzegovina with teens brought together to promote post-war healing and with youth in the Middle East through Seeds for Peace. *Laurazam.com*

A time for mourning and a time for dancing

The reasoning behind the tradition of women not attending funerals, by Zev Farber; an appreciation of *hevra kadisha* by Blu Greenberg; Syrian Jewish community mourning practices, by Linda Shamah; the death of the biblical Miriam by Erica Brown; are among the richly themed articles in the summer 2008 issue of JOFA Journal from the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, which will hold its 7th international conference in New York on Saturday night and Sunday, December 19-20. *jofa.org*

Suite Française

You've heard about the manuscript—written in tiny, hurried handwriting for lack of time and paper before Irene Némirovsky was deported to Auschwitz in 1942. It contained the first two parts of her planned five-part novel. Six decades later, *Suite Francaise* won France's Renaudot Prize and has been a bestseller in its English translation, as well, at the same time generating controversy over the author's harsh and unsympathetic portrayal of Jews. (Némirovsky converted Catholicism in 1939.) Now you can see the manuscript in its entirety through an interactive computer program, plus other artifacts of the re-acclaimed author. On view from September 24, 2008 through mid-March 2009 at the Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust in Manhattan *mhhnyc.org*

Irène Némirovsky, 1938

An Army of Women

Healthy women of all ages, ethnicities and levels of breast-cancer risk can be among those considered for research studies by scientiists seeking to "crack the code" of breast cancer. This call for participation is a joint project of the Dr. Susan Love

Research Foundation and the Avon Foundation. Info at 866-569-0388 or *armyofwomen.org*

The Lilith story

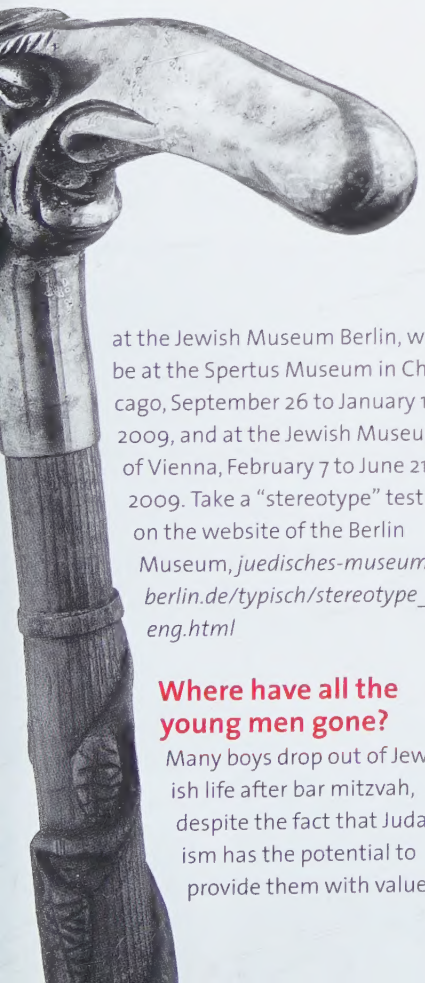
"Once a source of fear, Lilith has been transformed into an icon of freedom... As modern Jews begin to ask questions about sex, freedom and choice more directly, Lilith becomes a complex representation of our own desires," writes Jill Hammer in an illuminating and succinct essay that references ancient commentary as well as modern feminist interpretations by Judith Plaskow, Lynn Gottlieb, Enid Dame and Jacqueline Lapidus. *myjewishlearning.com/ideas_belief/god/Overview_About_God/Angels/Demons/Lilith.htm*

Blessed is the Match

At 23, Hannah Senesh, joined the only outside military mission trying to rescue Jews during the Holocaust. In 1944 Senesh left Palestine and daringly parachuted into Yugoslavia to reach her native Hungary. There she was captured, then tortured and executed by the Nazis. The heroic Senesh, a poet and diarist, is known for the eponymous poem she wrote in captivity, and for another, set to music, which in English reads "God, may there be no end, to sea, to sand, water's splash, lightning's flash, the prayer of of a human being." Roberta Grossman's film "Blessed is the Match" includes recently discovered correspondence between Senesh and her mother, and interviews with the poet's contemporaries. *Blessedisthematch.org*

Stereotypes of Jews & others

Pop culture is full of characterizations and classifications, which by simplifying help us overcome our fear of the unknown. At the same time, they can provide us with a breeding ground for racist ideologies. The exhibition "Twisted into Recognition: Cliches of Jews and Others" which originated



at the Jewish Museum Berlin, will be at the Spertus Museum in Chicago, September 26 to January 18, 2009, and at the Jewish Museum of Vienna, February 7 to June 21, 2009. Take a "stereotype" test on the website of the Berlin Museum, *juedisches-museum-berlin.de/typisch/stereotype_eng.html*

Where have all the young men gone?

Many boys drop out of Jewish life after bar mitzvah, despite the fact that Judaism has the potential to provide them with values and support as they navigate the journey from boyhood to adulthood. A three-year action-research campaign aims to help the Jewish community to better understand and engage pre-teen and teenage boys who drop out of Jewish life and to reverse this troubling trend by defining and promoting best practices to the Jewish community that will engage their interest; maintain their participation, and build boys' Jewish identities. (Brought to you by the organization that hosts Rosh Hodesh It's A Girl's Thing.) *MovingTraditions.org*

A community of *frum* queer women

To share stories of weaving together the queer and Jewish (including secular) parts of their lives and to explore *halakha*, gender identity, sexual orientation and more, the group Tirtzah has started a blog. *http://tirtzah.wordpress.com/* and listserv *http://groups.google.com/group/Tirtzah*. Tirzah also holds events in New York City. Have a story to share? Write *tirtzahcommunity@gmail.com*

The charitable Hebrew ladies of Victoria

Cecilia Sylvester, a pioneer member of this group, entertained society in her Fort Street home in Victoria. Hannah Director homesteaded with her family in British Columbia's interior, played violin in the Prince Rupert symphony orchestra circa 1910 and later hosted Kitsilano's Show Boat. The exhibit "The Ties that Bind" celebrates the Jewish community's full participation in British Columbia history as Canada's West-coast province nears its 150th anniversary. At the Jewish Museum and Archives of B.C. in Vancouver's Jewish Community Centre *www.jewishmuseum.ca*

The Grace Paley Fellowship

Dedicated to the memory of the writer and activist who urged herself and others to "go forth with fear and courage and rage to save the world," this fellowship at Jews for Economic and Racial Justice will train a new generation of activists in grassroots organizing, Jewish history and culture and political analysis. *jfrej.org*

Did your mother survive the Holocaust?

Social worker Audrey Freshman, a child of survivors herself, is conducting an anonymous survey to find out how Jewish offspring of these mothers cope with stress and how future generations grow up in the aftermath of trauma. A $5 contribution to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum will be made for each completed survey. *surveymonkey.com/holocauststudy*. Or *afreshstartonline.com*

For events and projects taking place in between issues of Lilith, to listen to podcasts and respond to blog posts, check out WHAT'S NEW on the Lilith homepage: *www.Lilith.org. Send suggestions for this section to: info@Lilith.org*

compiled by Naomi Danis

After 39 years of marriage, her husband, Herman—"H"—collapsed suddenly and died in the lobby of their apartment building.

EPILOGUE

by ANNE ROIPHE

We had talked about this. He was born 12 years before I was. He was in good health and good mind but the possibility of widowhood haunted me. He said that it would be a compliment to our marriage, to his love for me and mine for him, if I managed this widowhood well and was able to enjoy my life with another partner or without. He expected that of me. He told me a dozen times in the last few years that I had made him happy. This was comforting but not comforting enough. The ash was still in my mouth. The log remained in my stomach. I considered that he had asked too much of me.

We had argued about the bedroom wallpaper. It had been on the wall when we moved into the apartment some 18 years ago. The pattern was of repeated small bunches of flowers, blues and yellows, little touches of roses, and they were on a background of ivory and very dense, so that they seemed at a quick glance like a field full of wildflowers. This wallpaper spoke of New England inns and farmhouses in the plains. It was already dingy at the edges when we moved in. Increasingly the background turned to gray and there were peeling strips along the baseboard. I wanted to change the paper. H. wanted to leave it be. He was attached to it. He didn't want to spend the money. He liked it. He saw no reason for change.

I think of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's book *The Yellow Wallpaper*, written in 1899. A woman suffers from a terrible grief after giving birth to a daughter and is confined by her doctor to a bedroom with yellow wallpaper where she goes gradually mad until she kills herself. This novel is considered a primary feminist text. This is a story about how men impose literal and symbolic immobility. Here is a woman deprived of her own volition, chained to an infant, subservient to a husband and without hope. True, I said, dear Charlotte Perkins Gilman, true. I had been an early feminist. My mother had hobbled about on her Cuban heels while I had a first serve that whizzed past the boys. But I always had a tendency to wander from the political line. In the 70s I never considered that men were to blame for all oppression and I never believed that children were a burden. Mine sometimes were and sometimes were not.

I was raised, child of the 40s, girl of the 50s, to flirt, to flatter, to flutter about. Those are traits that are hard to remove just because the climate changes. I admit to a desire, lifelong, to put my hand in a man's hand and let him lead me through the thicket of taxes and insurance and such. I want to go walking in the woods with a man pushing aside the heavier brush. I want a man to call a taxi or help me over a fence. I have always thought of men as the necessary other. The only question in my mind has been which man and when I married H. the question was answered. Still drifting, avoiding memories, sitting on my bed and not moving, finding it hard to go to the store and buy the barest of necessities, I was aware that in this widowhood I could use a sharp infusion of feminist pride, a sense of my own power, a disinterest in attachment, a venturesome soul daring to walk my own path. My first not-so-firm step was to remove the old wallpaper. ■

This is the ad her daughters sent to The New York Review of Books:

"Widowed novelist, near 70, ex-Park Avenue girl, ex-beatnik, ex-many other things too complicated to list here, loves big parties, summers at the beach, grandchildren, seeks interesting man for dinner and a movie."

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